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The Life of Paul Gauguin

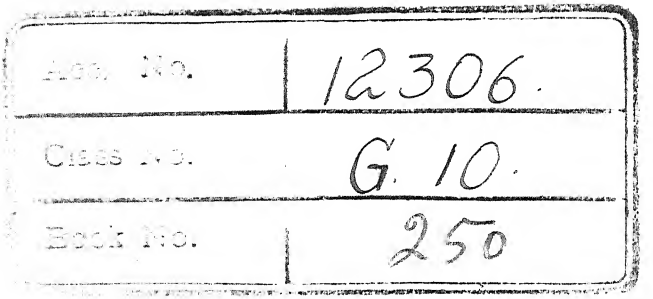
ROBERT BURNETT

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To

CHARLES LAMBE

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The Self-Portrait reproduced on the dust-jacket is also by permission of Messrs. Wildenstein & Co.

Few artists can have suffered more from false tradition than Paul Gauguin and, for this, some of those who knew him are responsible. One writer, in the course of his personal reminiscences, preferred even to adopt a false chronology and, when challenged by a contemporary, unhesitatingly declared that he had done so because he had "found it nicer that way." But Gauguin's character, the few facts that were known of his life and, later, his inaccessibility in Polynesia allowed a legend to grow up even before his death in 1903. Since then the legend has continued to wander from the truth until there are but two points in it which resemble fact—that he was at one time a successful business man and that he died, a painter, in Oceania.

The sources of information on Paul Gauguin's life are not numerous and without his Polynesian letters to his friend Daniel de Monfreid and the two books of descriptions and impressions, which he wrote while living in the Islands, it would have been impossible to reconstruct the events of the years that he spent in the South Seas and, to a certain extent, his early life. I have not attempted a critical study of Gauguin's painting and have mentioned his work only when he himself wrote of it.

I am indebted to the following books: Charles Chassé: *Gauguin et le Groupe de Pont-Aven*, which contains M. Mothéré's reminiscences; Jean Dorsenne: *La Vie Sentimentale de Paul Gauguin*; Paul Gauguin: *Lettres à Georges-Daniel de Monfreid*; Gerstle Mack: *Paul Cézanne*; Charles Morice: *Paul Gauguin*; Robert Rey: *Gauguin*; Marcel Rivière: *La Vie et l'Œuvre de Flora Tristan*; Jean de Rotonchamp: *Paul Gauguin*; and Vincent Van Gogh: *Further Letters of Vincent Van Gogh to his Brother—1886–89*. Paul Gauguin's own writings consist of two published volumes: *Noa-Noa* and *Avant et Après* and three manuscripts which have not yet been published in full: *Le Cahier pour Aline*, *Diverses Choses*, and *Racontars d'un Rapin*.

I would like to express my gratitude to Monsieur Ludovic Rodo and to Mr. and Mrs. Lucien Pissarro for their kind help and for permission to see unpublished letters in their possession; to Madame Basso for permission to visit the house in which Gauguin and Vincent Van Gogh lived in Arles; and to Mr. Douglas Cooper for his great assistance in proof-reading.

R. B.

PART I

"Quant à moi, je me suis reculé bien loin, plus loin que les chevaux du Parthénon . . . jusqu'au Dada de mon enfance, le bon cheval de bois."

PAUL GAUGUIN: *Diverses Choses*

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PART I

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PAUL GAUGUIN: *Diverses Choses*

PROLOGUE

MODERN TIMES BEGAN

Quietly, and with seasonable weather, the momentous year of 1848 began. The streets were silent with the snow as the carriages and the people passed. There was little wind and the trees that bordered the Seine stuck in the sharp air like chalky coral arms on a sea-bed of white sand. Frost shone on the walls and on the straw-covered flowerbeds of the public gardens. The air was grey, and the sky hung low over the roofs and chimney-stacks of the wintry city.

The ceremonies for the New Year were over. Guests who had come to Paris had returned to the country contented with their visit to the capital, while King Louis-Philippe sat on in the Palace of the Tuileries with his homely wife, surrounded by a respectable and dowdy court, playing backgammon and sipping weak mint-tea. Through the long windows he could look past the white stone groups and urns and the boundaries of the gardens, beyond the Egyptian obelisk that had been a present to himself, to the hill where Napoleon's great triumphal arch reared up as a memorial to a former moment in France's glory. The symmetrical prospect pleased the tidy and unfiery mind of the son of Philippe-Egalité. He was a good father, a kind husband who doted on his grandchildren and an honest man by nature. Thrifty and cunning, he had known how to place the monarchy on a firm pedestal. He had found happiness in the security that had come to him through his diplomacy and that promised to surround his family and his heirs after his death. He had achieved an improbable feat when he had married monarchy to republicanism, its violent offspring, and the merchants and bankers who had given him his throne were pleased, for the country had been governed as they wished. He was a compendium of goodness and respectability, yet he had bored and irritated France for eighteen years. During all

his reign he had added nothing but an obelisk to the glory
the nation.

When the snow began to fall again the great arch in tl
distance disappeared from view and only the expanse
whitened gardens and the trees remained. The year that ha
opened in so seasonable a manner bore to the king no warnir
sign of the convulsion that it had to offer. There had bee
crises in the government and of late they had been mo
frequent than was usual, but Louis-Philippe loved the diplc
matic machinations of such events and prolonged them for
long as he was able. Sometimes vague reports came to th
palace of spoken discontent and of social theorists who shoute
violent words, but to the court it seemed that the simplifie
monarchy had come to stay. To the majority of the country h
was still a good citizen. In the past he too had called himsel
"Egalité," and even the most ill-disposed towards him remem
bered that his father had claimed with pride to be the son o
a groom from the palace stables. The ageing king played parlou
games and drank mild herb infusions while the new yea
gathered speed.

When the snow lay heavily, political considerations wer
numbed into a strange torpor. Only in the eating-houses of th
poorer quarters did anyone trouble to discuss the alternative
to the easy-going and corrupted government of the country. I
the Tuileries no one bothered. Those who had the inclinatio
to think of the condition of France thought rather of climati
than political considerations. Would the Seine freeze this year
Would the snow lie long? Would there be floods in the spring

In the following month, when the thaw began, a voice in
bored Paris crowd that imagined a grievance against the king'
chief minister called half-inadvertently for a republic. Othe
voices soon took up the cry and two days later, to the un-
believing consternation of the court, King Louis-Philippe anc
Queen Marie-Amélie were forced to fly.

The prince, who had been born in the year of the Boston
Tea Party, who had flirted and fiddled with the Revolution,

who in exile had had many occupations under many names in many places, and who had ultimately returned to France to become King of the French, departed surreptitiously under the simplest name of all. Travelling as a Mr. Smith, he went with the Queen to London.

While, in England, the Smiths lived under a grander alias than the one that they had chosen for their flight, in Paris the unaccountable offspring of Frankenstein and Pandora tried to fill their places. The revolution that had sent them so suddenly away spread across Europe like a wild fever, destroying kings and ministers and systems. New ideas and newer methods were invented. Karl Marx came when Metternich departed. Modern times began.

Chapter One

PAUL GAUGUIN IS BORN: 7th JUNE, 1848

The spring of 1848 passed while the new masters of France tried to rule the country, haggling and squabbling and emitting beneficent decrees, provoked by the shrill fear that events were running away from them out of their control. When the summer came, Paris had still no thought for anything but its own cares, for the threatening shadow of another outbreak of the Commune could be seen by all.

The gardens, that a few months before had been white with snow, now glowed with the flowers that the palace gardeners had planted in spite of their change of owner and the crowds that gathered there stood discussing the complicated possibilities which the future seemed to hold. There was skirmishing in the streets and at night wild talk in the open air and under the trees. The refugee king was already forgotten, for France was too occupied with wondering what would happen next.

On the 7th June, at the height of the anxiety and unrest that accompanied the events which were leading no one knew where, the wife of an unimportant journalist from Orleans, who lived in the rue Notre-Dame-de-Lorette in Montmartre, gave birth to a son. It was her first child, and it received the names of Eugène-Henri-Paul.

In the days that followed, Paris became more and more unsettled. The Socialists' threat to the government quickly developed into an insurrection of the working classes. The rising of the Commune, that had been feared since Louis-Philippe had fled, broke with unknown violence, and for several days the northern suburbs were the scene of civil war. To the mother and child in Montmartre the noises of death and suffering came as a daily chorus until the troops of the government had reduced the infuriated people to submission behind their barricades. Paul Gauguin had been born under a violent star.

Clovis Gauguin, the father of the child, was a native of Orleans and belonged to a family of the *petite bourgeoisie* of complete but respectable obscurity. He was a political correspondent on the staff of *Le National,* a Liberal and Republican paper. He was not a journalist of prominence and was not well enough known to appear in the official journalists' records of the time. It is possible that he died too young for any talent that he had to show itself. He had, however, made a strange marriage.

His wife, Aline-Marie Chazal, was of French nationality, but she descended from a rich and erratic Spanish family in Peru. Her father, an engraver and lithographer, had had the misfortune to marry one of the strangest women of the nineteenth century—a theorist whose interest in the affairs and misfortunes of others had brought great suffering to her own family. This disturbing person, who had been known to the world of her socialistic activities by her maiden name of Flora Tristan, was the daughter of a Peruvian officer, Don Mariano Tristan y Moscoso, and of a French mother. Don Mariano, a friend of Bolivar the Liberator, came of an old family of Aragon origin, but poor and emigrant, which in the past had gone to Peru and had become rich. Tradition held that an ancestor had been a Borgia, and that through a subsequent South American marriage the blood of the great king Montezuma flowed in the family's veins.

From an uncle, who had been Archbishop of Granada, Don Mariano had inherited six thousand francs a year, and from his family he received from time to time substantial sums of money. Soon after his marriage, however, his fortunes declined through the loss of a ship that was bringing much bullion to him from Peru and that fell into the hands of the English. A further sum of money was lost when another bullion ship was sunk off the coast of Spain.

His daughter Flora was born in Spain in 1803 and a son five years later. Don Mariano died of apoplexy in the year of his son's birth and in 1818, when the boy died, his widow took

Flora to Paris, where they lived in almost complete poverty.

Flora found employment after a time as an *ouvrière coloriste* in the studio of a lithographer, André Chazal, where her work consisted of colouring perfumers' labels in the evenings. Her employer fell in love with her and at the age of eighteen her mother forced her to marry him. In later years she declared that she had never loved her husband, but a letter that has survived is evidence to the contrary. Flora, owing probably to the years that she had spent in Spain, had not yet learned to spell French correctly. "Je te direye, mon chère," she wrote, "que cette soirée que je desirait tant, je voudrais bien qu'elle soit à venir . . . Toute la nuit je n'ai fait que pensée a toi, j'étais toujours avec toi, enfin je nez vus que toi dans toute la nature. Adieu ami de mon coeur, au le matin comme il tapelais se coeur . . . mille baisers de flamme sur tes jolis petites laivre, adieu." Later, when it was necessary, she learned to spell better.

The absence from the character of Paul Gauguin of the more usual qualities of the French bourgeoisie can only be traced to the strong strain of his non-French blood, a strain that, judged by the later activities of his grandmother, were of a kind and of a strength to submerge any other.

Chazal's marriage with Flora Tristan was a failure from the beginning. She was good-looking in a Spanish way, short and dark, but independent and domineering, with an outspoken tongue. In the four years while she lived with her husband two children were born, both sons, of whom only one survived. Her daughter, Aline-Marie, was born in October 1825, a short time after she and her husband had separated.

Flora Chazal lived for a time with her two children near the Jardin des Plantes. She obtained work in a confectionery shop and later as a housemaid with an English family who took her to England in 1826, a country that she visited again four years later. During this time she left her children with her mother and took an ever-increasing interest in social questions, developing the theories which she later advocated with so much

hysterical persistency. Her life for the next seven years was spent in incessant travelling and she had many petty adventures. In 1831 she was in the Vendée and was arrested three times by the police in mistake for the Duchesse de Berry, who was known to be in that part of France in disguise after the unsuccessful insurrection that should have placed her son on the throne of France in the room of King Louis-Philippe.

When she was thirty she went to South America to obtain recognition and financial help from her father's family. Before leaving she placed her daughter in the *pension* of a Mlle de Bourzac and reverted to her maiden name. After a voyage of five months she reached Valparaiso in Chile and travelled to Arequipa and to Lima, the capital of Peru, where she at last met her uncle, Don Pio Tristan y Moscoso, and other members of the family. When she left South America after a visit of little more than a year she was granted a pension by her relations.

On her return to France she devoted herself entirely to the development of her new social theories and became a fervent disciple of Saint-Simon, the revolutionary theorist. She wrote, and from her pen came a stream of political and social violence. She shocked and angered all those to whom her writings were not addressed and divided those who knew her into those who loved and those who hated her. She published a record of her adventures in South America which was later publicly burned in Arequipa and which caused her to lose the pension that her family had given her. A novel, entitled *Méphis*, followed which caused her even greater trouble, for it contained new ideas on the subject of love mingled with advanced revolutionary theories.

She made two further visits to England. During her first visit, while working as a housemaid, she had found the country prosperous, but four years later England had appeared changed and "very worried." In 1835 she noticed that real need had begun to make itself felt in the middle as well as the working classes, while during her last visit in 1839 she observed profound misery, extreme irritation and great discontent among

the people. She read Mary Wollstonecraft on *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* and Ryan on *Prostitution in London*. Her last memory of England was that of a beggar dying in the streets of London. The impressions of these four visits were published as *Les Promenades dans Londres*, and she continued her sociological writings, producing a treatise on Feminine Emancipation and a work in which she advocated the formation of trade unions in France.

Flora quarrelled incessantly with her husband over the custody of their daughter, Aline-Marie, each parent kidnapping the child in turn. André Chazal, who already had the custody of their son, was living in poor circumstances in Montmartre. Finally in 1838, provoked beyond endurance, he tried to murder his wife, waiting for her armed with two pistols outside her house in the rue du Bac and shooting her in the shoulder. Flora escaped into a shop and Chazal was disarmed. She had that day been to a meeting at which George Sand had been present, and a short-lived and mistaken rumour spread in Paris that it was the great woman writer who had been the victim of the attempted assassination.

During her long convalescence—the ball had lodged beneath her heart—Flora continued writing, and produced articles on *Art Since the Renaissance* as well as an appeal to the Chambre des Députés for the abolition of the death sentence.

In January of the following year Chazal stood his trial for attempted murder. His defenders tried to justify his action by claiming that Flora's writings were *scabreux*, that she had admitted to bigamy, and that her daughter was unnaturally precocious and had been heard to say that she was a Mussulman. Flora was "elegantly" dressed throughout the trial and wore a green velvet hat with a black veil. Her hair was now streaked with grey, but she had lost none of the whiteness of her skin, nor the disarming look in her large black eyes, nor the natural redness of her lips. Her carriage was as graceful and her repartee as pointed as before.

André Chazal could not be saved by the arguments of the

defence and was sentenced to twenty years' penal servitude. He received a pardon when he had been seventeen years in prison and died at Evreux in 1860 after four years of liberty.

Flora Tristan's conjugal persecutions were now over and she was free to go her fire-eating way unhampered. She toured the industrial districts of France, addressing meetings of the workers, urging them to band themselves against their employers. The future grandmother of Paul Gauguin appeared as a female firebrand in the factories of the north and in the ports and dockyards of the west and south. Her popularity with the workpeople was very great, for, besides her speeches which appealed to them, she possessed "a captivating voice and allure." She possessed above all the greatest courage of her convictions and this was a quality that she was to pass on in so great a degree to her grandson.

Proudhon, who declared that she had genius, Madame Desbordes-Valmore and the Abbé Constant were among her intimate friends. Paul Gauguin was proud to own her as a grandmother, but his information about her was not always correct. He believed that she was something of a blue-stocking in household matters and that she could not cook and that she had founded, in collaboration with "Père" Prosper Enfantin, a prominent follower of Saint-Simon, a religion of her own that she had named *Mapa,* with herself as *Pa,* a female deity, and her co-founder as *Ma,* a male god. This tradition was inaccurate, for the short-lived creed called *Mapah* or *evadisme*—a term derived from the names of Adam and Eve—was founded by a sculptor named Ganneau who preached the perfect equality of man and woman in a studio on the Ile Saint-Louis. The fundamentals, however, of this new religion were in agreement with Flora Tristan's belief that the human race had but one mother on earth and but one father in heaven. She had always demanded the sovereignty and autocracy of women and imagined Utopia as a world run in the fashion of a beehive, with herself as the queen. When she died in 1844, in Bordeaux, while on one of her tours of the

industrial regions of France, the working people who had known her sent many delegations to follow her coffin and subscribed to give her a tombstone in the cemetery where she was buried. "I have been wife, I have been mother," she declared, "but society has broken my heart."

Her daughter, who had been married after her father's trial, had not inherited her tempestuous character. In 1851, when the *coup d'état* of Prince Louis Napoléon put an end to the democratic government that had survived the Commune of three years before, her husband's work with *Le National* came to a sudden end. Besides their son Paul they had now a daughter, Marie, and they found themselves faced with a serious crisis. Clovis Gauguin was in the position where it was impossible for him to obtain work in France under the new regime. The resources of the family were not great and he could obtain little help from his father in Orleans.

He determined in consequence to leave France for Peru. There, through his wife's connections, he hoped to be able to make a new life for his family, intending to found a newspaper in Lima.

After much discussion the family set sail. The voyage was long and the conditions under which they were obliged to travel, owing to the misfortune of finding themselves with an intolerable captain, were extremely trying. After many weeks the ship reached the Straits of Magellan that divide the southernmost land of South America from the barren snow-capped islands that peter on to end in Cape Horn. When the ship arrived at the small whaling port of Puntas Areñas the family decided to go on shore, but Clovis Gauguin, whose heart was weak, collapsed in the *baleinière* and died from a cardiac seizure. There was little consolation for his widow in the name that the French had given to this, the most southerly township in the world: Port Famine.

Chapter Two

THE EMIGRATION TO PERU

Lima sprawled squatly in its wide brown plain, elevated only a little above the harbour at Callao. In summer the mountains that rimmed the city from the east and north were jagged against the joining colours of the sunset sky. They were tawny and yellow and ashen. Their silhouette flowed on in an undulating way, or rose abruptly and fell, darkening and lightening until the foothills were sunk in the surrounding plain. To the west the sinking sun burnt quickly into the sea, staining the cloudless sky, and the adobe buildings of the city shed their own light and glowed as the day was finished. The stars appeared suddenly in a well-matched brilliance with the eager movement of the southern tropic sky, which at this latitude and in this rainless air seemed farther from the earth than elsewhere in the world. It was an almost barren landscape of unmerging and contrasted colours, well defined.

The water from the river Rimac was not allowed to reach the sea after passing through the city. It was first tapped into channels that passed beneath the larger houses and later led off into the mandioca and the cotton fields. In the hot afternoons bullfights drew the people from their sleep, and at another season Italian music was played at the Opera to crowded houses, where young women waved their fans before the soft dark faces that they had crowned with the tall silk of their mantillas.

In the square, the cathedral confronted the sparse gardens with its towers, with stone that was creamy against the bronze of the tortoise fountain and the biscuit-coloured façade of the palace of the Grand Marshal of the country.

In winter, the sky was uniformly white from the high sea mist that held away the sun. There was still no rain, but in the early mornings the stones of the pavements of the city were

damp with the fallen moisture while the dust of the roads was still dry and whirled gently in the slight breezes of the evening. The sun was no longer there to burn and blind and the air was fresher, but the days were of the same duration. The surrounding valleys grew green with the leaves of yellow lilies and the plain took on a freshness that the sun had absorbed during the glaring summer. Beggars waited less drowsily now that the sun did not shine, and at night the strolling crowds added an extra covering for their shoulders. But these were passing details, and throughout the year the Limanians and their lives were very much the same.

Aline-Marie Gauguin came as an honoured visitor to Peru. Her grandfather, Don Mariano, had been dead for over forty years, but Don Pio, her great-uncle, still lived on. At this time he was a hundred and eight years old according to the general computation. An active man, he had taken a new wife at the advanced age of eighty and had had several children by this marriage. A cousin of the family, José Rufino Echenique, was for a time President during the years when Madame Gauguin and her children were in Peru. Her Limanian relations welcomed her, for she was pretty, and young Parisian women were infrequent visitors to their country. Don Pio, in particular, formed a warm affection for her, the more so that he saw in her a resemblance to his brother, Don Mariano. The family connection was large and she and her children were provided with all that they needed, and a house was put at her disposal. She quickly adapted herself to the ways of Limanian women, dressing as they, when the occasion demanded wearing the *manta* that covered the face and allowed only one eye to be seen: an eye that appeared to her young son as "soft, commanding, clear, affectionate." She was fond of mild practical joking, a pastime that appealed to the sense of humour of the presidential set. On one occasion she arranged for an important military personage, who was known to be fond of pimento, to be served at a dinner party with an exaggeratedly over-spiced dish. Sitting on purpose next to him she forced him with her

apparently innocent teasing, when the blood began to mount to his face, to eat it all.

For Paul and his young sister the years passed with the usual small adventures and misadventures of childhood. The flat roof of their house was the children's playground. A little negress had been allotted to them as a playmate and companion. All three shared a bedroom that opened off the courtyard of the house and spent many hours of each day with the Chinese launderer or watching the madman who, as custom arranged, was quartered on the family and was kept chained to an iron ring on the roof. There was no asylum in the city and the insane were kept by certain families as a form of taxation. On Sundays and in Holy Week and on Saints' Days the little negress walked in front of the family on their way to Mass carrying the carpet on which they knelt in the cathedral.

Gauguin retained throughout his life a vivid impression of many incidents from the four years of the family's stay in Peru, although the figure of his great-great-uncle Pio may have accumulated in his memory more fantasy and importance than tallied with the truth.

In spite of the dry beauty of the setting of the city, in the days when Paul Gauguin was a child, Lima possessed few of the civilised comforts of a modern capital. The streets were seldom cleaned and refuse was thrown from the houses to rot under the windows and to clutter the gutters and fill the air with evil smells. Scavenging vultures came to feed on the piles of garbage. The lovely buildings of the early Spanish conquerors showed well in the evening air, when their towers and roofs appeared as silhouettes against the sky, but the mornings brought a stronger light that discovered the dirt and discomforts which the night had hidden.

Paul developed a passion for wandering off in search of sweet things and, like the little negroes, did his best to obtain stumps of sugar-cane to suck, an occupation that caused his mother and the servants in the house frequent anxiety while they looked for him in the grocery shops of the neighbourhood.

But it was the multiple happenings in the life of the city, with its terraced and flowered roofs, that provided the children with their real excitements. There were earthquakes that woke them at night and that made the silver-framed portraits in their room move in an unaccountable and frightening way; there were great processions in the streets on Saints' Days, when the figures of the Virgin and of the Saint were carried with incense burning and trumpets playing; there were other processions, sadder and smaller, bearing the Host to dying people, with a band that gave mourning music while the Holy Rites were being administered. There was Carnival time when anyone walking in the streets might with impunity be soaked with water thrown from behind the lattices of balcony windows, and the visit on Holy Thursday to a strange representation of the Lord's Supper in a near-by church where wooden food was set out on a table round which were seated life-like figures of the Apostles smoking cigarettes and of Christ with a cigar. There were the splendid dresses of the women at the official ceremonies that they were allowed to watch; visits to the houses of their relations; the great carved beds in the Limanian houses, the blue tiled courtyards, and the blackened silver kitchen pots and pans; the fantastic cemetery where each family had a mausoleum in Italian marble; always the broad bright patches of the colours of the summer skies. One night the three children were woken by the appearance of their madman in their room. He had escaped. But after peering at them, while they did not dare to move or breathe, he returned quietly to the roof leaving them unharmed.

When the family had been in Lima for nearly four years, the proceedings of Echenique's government in connection with the consolidation of the internal debt caused his predecessor in office to stage a revolution. Echenique's army was defeated and he fled abroad. It was January 1855, in the middle of the summer. But with the previous President back in power, life in Lima soon returned to its normal course. Don Pio's fortune remained untouched. Saltpetre and guano from the Lobos

Islands had added to the wealth of many of the Limanians. Don Pio showed no sign of dying. He was, by this time, nearly a hundred and twelve years old.

Aline-Marie Gauguin now determined to remain in Peru and to bring up her children there. In France she would be poor, while in Lima everything that she needed was provided for her. But when four years since her arrival had passed a pressing letter arrived from France advising her to return to Orleans to settle the estate of her father-in-law who had died.

Once again the long and arduous voyage round the south of the great continent had to be faced. They were, however, to be away for a few months only, and when Paul's grandfather's estate was settled they were to return. Don Pio, who was going to live for ever, would still be there when they returned.

Aline-Marie Gauguin arrived back in France in 1856 to settle the small estate of her father-in-law while in Lima her relations fought over the immense fortune of old Don Pio, for he had died soon after she had left Peru. By his will he had bequeathed to her, in memory of his brother Don Mariano and of her mother Doña Flora, an income of 5,000 *piastres fortes,* which was worth the not inconsiderable sum of £1,000 a year. But his other heirs twisted the wishes of the old dead man. They took all his property and sent Aline-Marie Gauguin nothing. Later the younger generation dissipated most of their patrimony in Paris in wild living, leaving but one female cousin behind them in Peru. She, to her sorrow, was unable to go with them for her condition was little better than that of a mummy.

Echenique's son later came to Paris and he proposed an arrangement with Aline-Marie Gauguin, but her reply was "All or nothing," and nothing she received. Since Paul Gauguin, when he first began to paint, did so less through yielding to an uncontrollable urge than through the accident of meeting painters at the house of a business colleague in Paris, it is probably fortunate that his mother was cheated by her Peruvian relations. Such a legacy could not fail to have affected the course

of his life, possibly disposing of the necessity that, finally, made him go to Paris to earn his living.

In the face of this reverse of fortune the family did not return to Lima but settled in Orleans, with a surviving brother of Clovis Gauguin, in the house that had belonged to Paul's grandfather.

Chapter Three

SCHOOLDAYS IN ORLEANS

For the next ten years Aline-Marie Gauguin and her children continued to live in Orleans. Isidore Gauguin, her brother-in-law, became the dominant male influence in Paul's life. He was called Uncle Zizi by the children and was a little man. Paul who, until the family's return from Peru, had spoken only Spanish, was faced at the beginning with the task of learning French. At the same time the independence of his character began to show itself. His first recorded words were those that he addressed to this favourite Uncle Zizi who, on seeing him stamping in the garden and throwing sand in every direction, enquired the purpose of his behaviour. Paul Gauguin, in spite of his eight years, replied that "Baby is naughty!" He had already felt it necessary to demonstrate that he was conscious of his will and that he wished others, at the same time, to be aware of it. As a contrast he also showed signs of the great patience that was so marked a characteristic of his life and such a necessity to him. He was seen by his mother sitting motionless and apparently enraptured under a walnut-tree that together with a fig-tree grew in a corner of the same garden. His reply to a query as to what he could be doing was that he was waiting for the nuts to fall. The season of the year has not been recorded.

The independence, that had caused him as a still younger child to run away from his mother's house in Lima in search of sugar-cane, grew also. One day when he was nine he found a picture in a book that represented a man setting out to seek his fortune, a stick on his shoulder and a few possessions hanging from it tied in a cloth. Paul disappeared and was later found in the neighbouring forest of Bondy, carrying a stick in the same manner with a handkerchief containing sand. It was the butcher who found him and who brought him back to

his home. His mother was angry and he received several smacks from her "little hand that was as flexible as india-rubber." A few minutes later, however, when her virtuous anger was over, she gave way to tears and kissed him.

With a knife he amused himself by carving dagger handles and a friend of the family saw fit to exclaim in his hearing that he would one day be a great sculptor. Near the end of his life, after having been sculptor among many other things, Gauguin was content to say that the woman had unfortunately in no way been a prophet.

Paul attended a boarding-school in Orleans as a day boy. To his masters there he appeared as a problem. One declared that he would either turn out to be a dunce or a genius. Later when recalling this prognostication, he was able to exclaim with truth: "I became neither one nor the other." But a certain business ability showed itself even at this age. His mother, for whom business did not appear as an absolutely respectable occupation, was much upset when he came home from school in possession of a number of coloured glass marbles that she had not seen before. He hung his head at her enquiry as to their source, and she was angry when he admitted having obtained them from another boy in exchange for his rubber ball. "What?" she asked indignantly, "you, my son, you a trader?" "She was right," Gauguin once remarked, "and yet wrong, in the sense that as a child I had already begun to realise that there are a heap of things that cannot be bought."

In 1859, when he was eleven, he entered a seminary in the town, where at last he began to make proper progress with his education. In spite of his later anti-clerical views Gauguin acknowledged a debt to this period of his schooling. "I would not say that this education had no influence on my intellectual development: I believe, on the contrary, that it did me much good. Besides, I think that it was there that I learned at a tender age to detest hypocrisy, false virtues, sneaking (*semper tres*); to mistrust everything that was against my instincts, my heart and my reason. There I also learnt a little of that *esprit*

d'Escobar that is, God knows, a not unimportant force in a struggle. There I learned to concentrate myself in myself . . . to make my own toys, my difficulties also, with all the responsibilities that they carry with them. But mine was an exceptional case, and in general I think that the experiment is dangerous."

After the seminary he entered the *Lycée* at Orleans as a boarder, and here he remained a pupil until he was seventeen. The early voyages that he had made had left in him a desire to become a sailor. His mother would have liked him, since he wished to go to sea, to enter the *Ecole Navale*, and become an officer in the French Navy, but Paul's independent nature did not permit him to concentrate sufficiently on the preparation for the somewhat difficult examination that he would have been called upon to pass, and when the time came it was judged hopeless for him to attempt it.

This first failure did not, however, alter his desire to go to sea and, as an alternative, he entered the Merchant Service as a *pilotin*, or apprentice, the first stage to becoming an officer in the Merchant Marine. He had few regrets at leaving the *Lycée* where his tutor had been a former Grenadier of the Imperial Guard.

Chapter Four

THE SAILOR

Paul Gauguin's first appointment was to the *Luzitano*, a sailing ship of 1,200 tons belonging to the *Chargeurs Réunis*, plying between Havre and Rio de Janeiro. She was well found and carried passengers as well as merchandise, and was capable of twelve knots in a good breeze. The captain was a quadroon whom Gauguin considered "a quite charming papa." His first voyage was calm and uneventful, made long only by his impatience to arrive in Brazil. Before leaving France the *pilotin* whose place he had taken had come to him with a package and a letter that he had asked Gauguin to deliver to a certain Madame Aimée, who lived in the Rua d'Ovidor at Rio de Janeiro. " You will find," the *pilotin* had told him, "a charming woman to whom I recommend you quite exceptionally." She, like him, was from Bordeaux.

On his arrival Paul's first objective was the house of the lady in question, who received him warmly. She was a woman of thirty who took leading rôles in Offenbach operas. "I was at that time quite small and had, notwithstanding my seventeen and a half years, the appearance of being only fifteen. In spite of this, I had sinned once already in Havre before sailing, and my heart was beating wildly." Madame Aimée attracted him. "She was quite lovely . . . I can still see her expensively dressed, leaving in her coupé drawn by a fiery mule. Everyone courted her, but at that time her chief admirer was a son of the Emperor of Russia, a pupil on a training ship. He spent so much money on her that the commander of the ship went to the French consul to ask him to intervene adroitly. Our consul asked Aimée to visit him in his office and remonstrated with her clumsily. Aimée, not angry, began to laugh and said to him: 'My dear consul, I am delighted to listen to you and I think that you must be a very clever diplomat, but . . . but

I also think that in the matter of bottoms you understand nothing at all.' And she left him singing:

Dis-moi, Vénus, quel plaisir trouves-tu
à faire ainsi cascader ma vertu.

It was a completely delicious month for me."

When the month was finished the *Luzitano* set sail for Europe. Gauguin was now fully launched in the ways of the world. There were a few passengers, among whom was a rich Prussian woman. The captain became enamoured of her, but in vain, for Gauguin and she had found "a charming nest" in the sail-room. He amused himself by telling her a series of unlikely stories. When she asked him to meet her in Paris he gave her as his address a well-known house of ill-fame. "I was remorseful afterwards, but I could not have sent her to my mother. I don't wish to make myself out worse or better than I am. At eighteen one has in one many devilries."

Among his duties was to share the watch with the first mate who told him various stories connected with Oceania, and in particular how while still a boy he had been lost overboard and rescued finally by a passing ship. When this ship had put in later at a small island he had been left accidentally behind and had been looked after by the islanders who made him very happy. When, however, he had had the opportunity of leaving in another ship after two years of this life, he had done so and had ever since regretted it. It was probably the first indication to Gauguin of the existence in the world of a really carefree life, but for the moment he had no reason to wish to sample it.

This existence continued until just before his twentieth year, when he decided to give up the idea of becoming an officer in the Merchant Marine and to join the Navy, which he did at Havre as a third-class seaman in February 1868. His appointment book gave the following description of his appearance at that time: "Chestnut hair, brown eyes, medium nose, high forehead, medium mouth, round chin, oval face." His height was given as 1 m.630, or 5ft. 3½in. As seen later by himself he

was "very wide chested . . ." and "tall and big legged . . ." so it may be concluded that he continued to grow long after the normal age.

He joined the cruiser *Jérôme Napoléon* and was at first a stoker. Later he was employed in the steering-room. After two years he was promoted second-class seaman. The captain was Prince Jérôme Napoléon himself, and at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War the ship was in the North Sea, visiting Norway after a cruise to Greenland. At Tromsö the news of the declaration of war reached the ship. A visit to the North Cape and Spitzbergen was abandoned and two months later, at the beginning of September, the cruiser was at Copenhagen where her name, after the fall of the Empire, became *Desaix*. Until the following April, Gauguin served in her. He then was given a certificate of good conduct and ten months' leave with the right of extension, and at the age of twenty-three his life as a sailor was finished.

PART II

"La vie c'est à peine une division d'une seconde. En si peu de temps se préparer une Eternité!!! Je voudrais être un cochon: l'homme seul peut être ridicule."

PAUL GAUGUIN: *Avant et Après*

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Chapter Five

THE EXCHANGE BROKER

With her son absent at sea for long periods, and with her daughter growing up, Madame Gauguin had meanwhile left the house at Orleans where the family had lived with Uncle Zizi since their return from Peru and had moved to Saint-Cloud, near Paris. She was not entirely happy at her son's choice of a career and regretted his absence from her for such long periods. At Saint-Cloud she had friends, the family of a banker, Gustave Arosa, and she was able to exchange the restricted atmosphere of the provinces for the more cultivated surroundings of a town where the Imperial family had a country palace.

Paul's voyages had taken him over a great part of the world, although the exact itineraries he never later troubled to record. He had been back to the Pacific coast of South America, where at Iquique he had witnessed an earthquake and the submergence of a part of the town by the sea. It was while he was in India, and before he was twenty-one, that his mother had died. She had appointed Gustave Arosa to be her children's guardian.

When Paul Gauguin left the sea he returned to France. He had been a sailor for six years, but they had not been years to which he could look back with any real happiness. Once free of the sea he had no intention of regaining it, and although throughout the rest of his life his language never lost the seaman's idioms of speech, he referred to these years seldom and unwillingly.

When he reached Saint-Cloud, he found that most of his family's possessions—their library and nearly all their family papers, as well as furniture and the collection of Inca vases and silver figurines that his mother had brought with her from Peru —had been destroyed by a fire that the Prussian bombardment

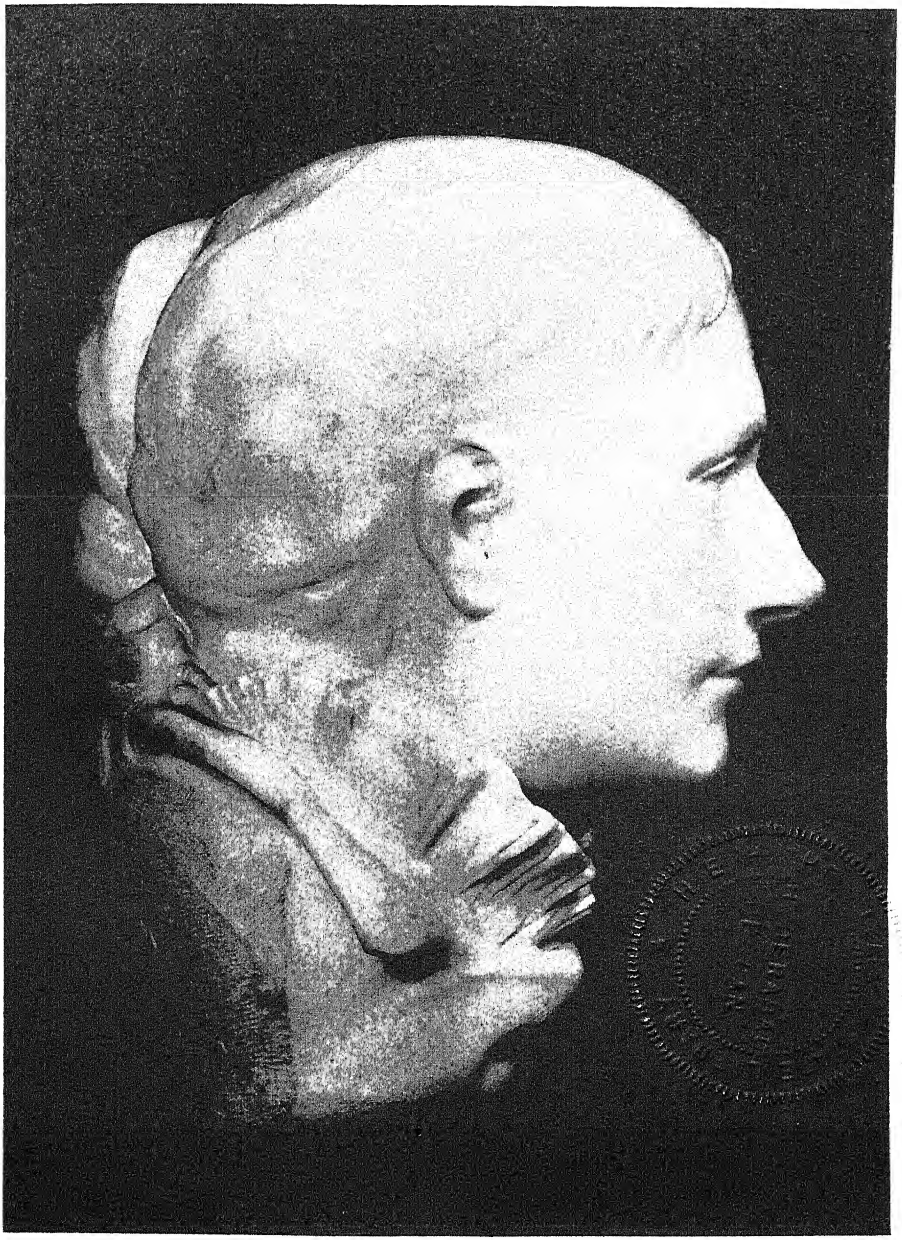
had caused at the time of the destruction of the Imperial Palace.

Gustave Arosa, through his son-in-law, the banker Adolfo Calzado, arranged for Paul Gauguin to enter the office of an Exchange broker of the name of Bertin, who had connections with the Bourse. The offices of Paul Gauguin's new firm were in the rue Laffitte. With the rapidity with which he attacked and mastered all problems that interested him, Gauguin soon became a successful business man. His work with his firm brought him into close contact with Stock Exchange operations and he speculated successfully. Within eighteen months he was earning an income large enough for him to marry on. This was the more fortunate, for at the beginning of 1873, while engaged on a hurried luncheon in a restaurant near the Temple, he fell a victim to love at first sight. Through the revolving door of the restaurant two young Danish women came in and sat at an adjoining table. His future wife, Mette[1]-Sophie Gad, was acting as companion to a younger girl. She was tall and had, it has been recorded, "a regular face, a dazzling complexion, hair light and luminous as fused metal." She was wearing a dark coat of a neat cut. Her head was well shaped and her ears, though large, were well formed, and her profile was strong.

Gauguin found no difficulty in discovering a reason for speaking to her, nor did he require many weeks to persuade her to marry him. "The originality of her character, as much as the loyalty of her sentiments," he wrote to her ward's mother, "attract to her here the esteem of everyone. I must in consequence consider myself very lucky at her choice. Believe me, that while taking away from Denmark such a rare pearl, I shall do everything within my power and even beyond it not to allow her to miss all those friends whom she will remember, inevitably, as belonging to the past."

The Gad family was typical of the Danish bourgeoisie to which it belonged. Respectability and security were its

[1]Mette resembles the bucolic English name of Maidy in pronunciation.



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watchwords. Gauguin offered both these qualities. His financial position was good and his prospects better. Two of Mette's sisters were already married, one to a member of the Nobel Committee of the Norwegian Parliament, the other to a German painter, who as an artist in the academic tradition was able to earn money in a way that won the respect of his wife's relations in Copenhagen.

Gauguin's wedding, after an engagement that lasted throughout the year, took place on the 22nd November. He was married under the regime of the simple community of property, but without a contract. The civil ceremony took place at the Town Hall of the IXth *arrondissement* and the religious service at the Protestant Church in the rue Chauchat, for Mette was a Lutheran. At the Town Hall Gauguin was brought into sharp contact, perhaps for the first time, with French bourgeois bureaucracy, a condition of affairs, upheld by a mentality, that was, later, to become his chosen antagonist, while the mentality itself he saw typified in the *imbéciles* of whom he discovered so great a number among the French general public. He was required to produce the death certificates of both his parents, but owing to his father's death in the Straits of Magellan he possessed only his mother's, significantly enough, however, inscribed as that of *Madame Veuve Gauguin*. But although his mother was described as a widow it did not satisfy the clerk that his father was dead. "There is nothing more obstinate than a Town Hall employee," he reflected in later years. "Fortunately the Mayor was an intelligent man and everything was arranged."

The first years of their marriage were extremely happy, for Gauguin was devoted to his wife whose northern fairness and complexion had so completely captured him. One commentator on this period has remarked that "everything, to her *svelte* coolness, contributed to fire the blood of this meridional with his burning Peruvian atavisms." Paul Gauguin was not, of course, a meridional, and his one visit of any length to the Midi, that he made many years

later, was cut short by an event that was not to leave him with a happy recollection of Provence. But if his Peruvian atavisms were strong, his physical appearance was also as profoundly un-French as were many of his instincts, and later, his art. From his French descent he had inherited nothing that could not also have been inherited from his Spanish ancestors, unless the great patience with his own life, that was his unchanging characteristic, were an inheritance from his grandfather Chazal, who however had found his fund of that virtue finally insufficient when faced with the original behaviour of his energetic and wayward wife Flora.

In Gauguin's face stood out the bones of a Spanish head. His high-beaked nose and large-boned jaw broadened to meet the wide-set eyes. His lips were full, almost Semitic. His ears were large and fleshy, while his comparatively low forehead led up to the small crown of his head. His eyes that were variously green-blue or green-grey were covered by heavy eyelids and possessed the penetrating quality of those of a silent man. Undoubtedly they were able to hold a person in a remarkable way, although they did not deserve the sinister reputation that his enemies chose to give them. When Gauguin later declared: "I possess the evil eye," he was mocking at a popular canard. His moustache, that contained reddish lights, contrasted with his darker eyebrows and with his hair and sloped unrulily to below the level of his underlip. When he smiled, his face, that in middle life wore a look of disdain, changed completely in its expression, becoming gentle. His hands were large and fleshy also, but the fingers tapered. He was of average height, but he was unusually well proportioned and had exceptional physical strength. In Peru, among those of Inca blood are many faces with features that could claim relationship with his. But of the existence of such blood in the veins of the Tristan and Moscoso families there is no record, only the tradition of descent from Montezuma. Gauguin himself believed in his possession of some non-European strain, and if there were any other blood beyond Aztec or Inca in his Spanish

ancestry, it could only be Negro or, more hypothetically, Polynesian. If the early discoverers of the Marquesas Islands, sent out by the Viceroy of Peru at the end of the sixteenth century, had brought back a Polynesian strain, this last hypothesis would not be impossible, although the strain would already have been two-and-a-half centuries old. Only physical signs suggest the possibility that the overwhelming strength of the Spanish blood which he received from his grandmother had been reinforced by some other blood, something old and independent and not entirely lost in its dilution and amalgamation with the blood of Spain.

Gauguin's marriage brought him five children. The eldest son was named Clovis after his own father. "Mette would be so happy if she could show you her baby," he wrote to his wife's late employer. "Do you know that he is lovely. It is not because we are his father and his mother that we judge him so, everyone does. White as a swan, strong as a Hercules. But I don't know if he is amiable. There are chances that he won't be. His father is so disagreeable." His only daughter, Aline, who was born on Christmas Day, 1877, was named after his mother. Three other sons, Emile, Jean and Paul, later completed the family. The house they first occupied was in the rue des Fourneaux. The owner was a sculptor.

The origins of Paul Gauguin's interest in painting were accidental or, at the most, the chance fact of seeing "modern" paintings provoked in him some natural but dormant desire to paint himself. His guardian, Gustave Arosa, possessed at Saint-Cloud a small collection of pictures—at that time a still courageous rarity—by those who were establishing the Impressionist School, and he was interested in the reproduction of pictures by the newly invented process of photogravure. This collection Gauguin had, inevitably, seen, but it was not until after his marriage that his newly found home-life offered him the leisure and opportunity for turning his own hand occasionally to painting. Mette had married a rising Exchange broker and had no suspicions that he would develop any other interest

in life. "No one gave Paul the idea of painting," she declared after his death. "He painted because he had to, and when we were married *I had no idea* that he had a disposition for the arts. But as soon as we were married he began to paint on Sundays—going sometimes to the Colarossi Studio—but without troubling about any particular professor."

In his office he found a colleague of the name of Emile Schuffenecker, an Alsatian, who also was interested in painting and who had some friends among the artists. He inclined to the academic tradition. Gauguin did not admire his work, but nevertheless their similar interests drew them together.

Gauguin attempted sculpture in the studio of his landlord, and made two marbles, one a portrait of his wife, the other of his son Clovis. In the Salon of 1876 he exhibited a landscape which was sufficiently in the academic tradition to gain admission.

Meanwhile, as his speculations succeeded and his income rose, he began to buy pictures himself. His profits from his work were more than sufficient for the needs of his family, and in the eleven years that he spent at Bertin's before he decided to become a professional painter he spent over £600 on his collection. In his best years, his income approached fifteen hundred pounds. Mette had made a highly profitable marriage.

While engaged on forming his collection of Impressionist paintings he became first acquainted with the picture-dealers and through them with some of the artists themselves. At Durand-Ruel's gallery he met the painter Camille Pissarro. Pissarro was by nationality a Dane, having been born at St. Thomas, in the Danish West Indies, and as a compatriot of Mette frequently visited them at their house.

With the increase in his interest in painting and his success at Bertin's, Gauguin moved to a *pavillon,* a small house in a garden, in the rue Carcel in the XVth *arrondissement* that had attached to it a large studio. Here he was at last able to

paint in comfortable surroundings and to receive his friends and to hang those pictures that he bought.

Gauguin at this time was an admirer of Edgar Allan Poe. He was never a general reader, detesting newspapers and the political diatribes contained in them, preferring lighter reading as a distraction from his business life. One winter evening, soon after the move to the rue Carcel, Mette and he were sitting in front of the fire in their new house. Mette was reading Poe's *Black Cat* while he was deep in Barbey d'Aurevilly's *Bonheur dans le Crime*. When the fire became low, Mette went down to the cellar to fetch some coal. On the stairs a black cat jumped up in front of her. She was for a moment somewhat frightened but after hesitating continued downstairs. When she had placed two shovelfuls in the bucket that she had taken with her, a skull rolled out of the pile of coal. Terrified at last, Mette left everything in the cellar and rushed upstairs to the sitting-room, where she fainted. Gauguin in turn went down when Mette had recovered and brought to light a skeleton. It was an old articulated skeleton that had been used by the former owner of the house, a painter also, who had thrown it into the cellar when it had begun to fall to pieces. It was a simple explanation, but a strange coincidence. "Never," Gauguin was forced to advise, "think of reading Edgar Poe in any but a very reassuring place."

Gauguin's interest in painting continued to grow and the quieter domestic life of the few years immediately after his marriage gave way to other years in which every interest became secondary to his hobby, in which he followed the teachings of Pissarro. Pissarro had, since 1865, been one of the leaders of the new movement in painting. By using only the three primary colours and their derivatives, the artists of this movement endeavoured to record their impressions of the effect of light on objects and to communicate that impression to the eye of the spectator. The year 1874 saw the first group exhibition of work of these painters—chief among whom, beside Pissarro, were Monet and Manet, Renoir, Cézanne and Guillaumin—

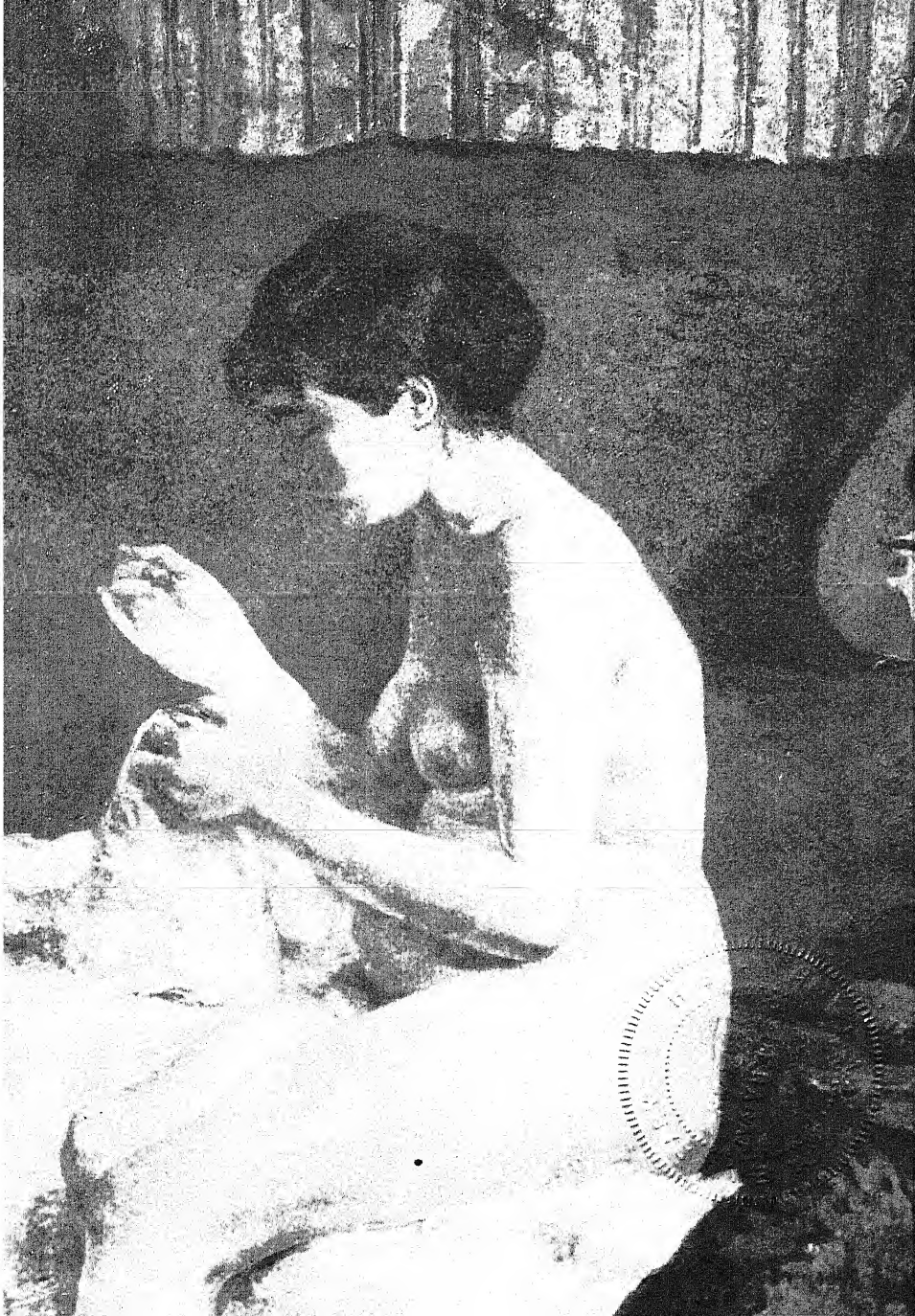
and the mocking label of Impressionists was given to them. They were bound together by their adherence to the three-colour concept. Their personal technical methods and tendencies were left to them to develop as they wished. This new group enjoyed the generous ridicule of the public and the angry hatred of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, while the critics were almost unanimous in their impatient incomprehension.

The meeting-place of the Impressionists was the Café Guerbois, in Montmartre, and here Gauguin went in the evenings, when he and Mette were not receiving his friends in his house, to meet those painters whom he knew and to make the acquaintance of others. Cézanne and Monet were among his early friends, as well as Manet and Guillaumin. To Manet he showed one of his canvases, saying that he was but an amateur, an Exchange broker who painted only on Sundays and on holidays. Manet, liking the picture and wishing to encourage him, replied: "There are no amateurs but only those who paint bad pictures."

Gauguin now possessed paintings by nearly all the members of the group. Rotonchamp mentions "a canvas by Manet, several Renoirs, canvases by Claude Monet, Cézanne, Pissarro, Guillaumin and Sisley, a Jongkind, a Lewis Brown and two drawings by Daumier."

At last, in 1880, Gauguin appeared with the Impressionists at the fifth Exhibition of the group, held in the rue des Pyramides. Joris-Karl Huysmans, the critic, was one of the few who attempted to understand the movement, but Gauguin's paintings in this exhibition appeared to him to be merely a dilution of the works of Camille Pissarro.

It was at about this time also that Gauguin's distant relation, Juan Martin Echenique, the son of President Echenique, came to Paris on a financial mission for the government of Peru. A loan, guaranteed by the rich guano deposits on islands off the Peruvian coast, was being arranged with a Paris bank. Echenique stayed with a sister who possessed a large house in the rue de Chaillot and two beautiful daughters. This lady,



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on the strength of her inside information, gambled heavily in the new loan. But she soon had cause to regret her brother's arrival, for the affair went wrong and she found herself the possessor of several millions of valueless scrip. To Gauguin, who saw her soon afterwards, she stated that she was ruined. "I only have eight horses in the stables now. What is to become of me?" The annuity that had been willed to Gauguin's mother by old Don Pio had remained unpaid and although someone with whom he might once have come to terms was at last within reach, now that his mother was dead the annuity had lapsed and there was little chance of arranging a satisfactory settlement of the arrears, a thing which Gauguin did not attempt to do.

In 1881 Gauguin exhibited at the sixth Impressionist Exhibition a picture that brought him unlimited praise from Huysmans. It was a nude, a woman seen in profile, mending her shift and seated on a divan. "I do not hesitate to affirm," the critic wrote, "that, among contemporary painters who have painted the nude, none has yet given such a vehement note of reality . . . I am happy to acclaim a painter who has felt, as I have, an imperious disgust for mannequins, with even rosy breasts, short hard stomachs—mannequins posed according to a *soi-disant* good taste—and drawn according to receipts learned from the copying of plaster casts . . . Rembrandt, alone, has up till now painted the nude . . . it is to be hoped that artists of talent, like M. Gauguin, may do for their epoch what Rembrandt van Ryn did for his . . . M. Gauguin, as the first for many years, has attempted to represent the woman of our days and . . . he has fully succeeded and has created an intrepid and authentic canvas." Gauguin was also working at sculpture in wood, examples of which he exhibited at the same time. Such praise and the warm admiration of the other members of the group gave him more than ever the desire to spend every available moment in his studio when he was free from his profitable but time-wasting office. He had a drastic example before him, for Emile Schuffenecker had that

year decided to leave finance in order to devote his whole time to painting.

Gauguin worked on throughout the following year, exhibiting at the seventh Impressionist Exhibition, but in Huysmans' view he made little progress along the lines that had been predicted for him. Firm in his own conviction that he was progressing and incapable at any time of supporting gladly those whom he considered to be fools, he told the critic to mind his own business. The moment in his life was approaching when, if he were to be able to satisfy the demand that his painting made on his time, he also would have to relinquish his business activities altogether.

Mette had watched the hobby, that her husband had begun after their marriage, grow in importance. He had for several years been associated with a movement but now he was developing ideas that began to draw him outside the confines of the group. Aware of the superabundant energy with which he was endowed she could realise the difficulty with which he tolerated the interruption that his daily work caused in his now chief interest. He was not a poor man and apart from the several hundred pounds invested in his collection he had saved money during the eleven years that he had spent at Bertin's.

In January of the following year, 1883, he gave up his work as an Exchange broker and relinquished all his interest in Stock Exchange speculation. Mette, who had become accustomed to the possibility, could do nothing else but acquiesce. The praise that her husband had received was reassuring. Their savings would support them until his pictures sold sufficiently well to bring in a proper income for the needs of the family. She was fully aware of her husband's energy and of his ability to succeed at everything that he attempted, but it was not a move of which her family—used to comfortable security and the elimination of risks—would have approved. Paul Gauguin was nearly thirty-five years old. He had twenty years before him for the fulfilment of all his plans. "From now on," he told his friends, "I am going to paint every day."

Chapter Six

THE PROFESSIONAL PAINTER

Mette Gauguin was an intelligent woman. Her husband had decided to change his profession and whatever her misgivings may have been, she realised that the best thing that she could do was to make the best of it, the best of a doubtful situation. She could not pretend to understand the overwhelming desire to paint that her husband experienced, for she understood none of his motives. She possessed, however, an independent character and cared little for the opinion of others if they were not in her immediate family circle. Many years later, when her husband was dead, and famous, she was able to say to her sons ". . . he was so intelligent that I do not believe that he could ever have done anything wrong," but there were to be many years of unhappiness and disagreement between them before she could look back retrospectively to make that statement. For the moment her natural optimism, supported by her husband's, made the change of profession appear less serious to her than such a change might have appeared to other women, had they been in her position. Her husband had consulted certain of his friends before finally deciding on the change, and they, on whose judgment she knew he felt he could rely, had been unanimous in saying that his true profession was undoubtedly painting, not money-broking.

For the first few weeks after leaving Bertin's, Gauguin made no change in his life, except that he spent his days in his studio instead of in the rue Laffitte. The family continued to occupy the *pavillon* in the rue Carcel and to live at the same rate of expenditure as before. But no buyers for his pictures appeared, and it was ultimately decided that the family should leave the rue Carcel and move to Rouen, in Normandy, where they would be able to live more cheaply. Gauguin's preoccupation

with the cost of living, a preoccupation that was to pursue him through the rest of his life, had begun.

Towards the end of the year, and after eight months of considerable painting activity, Gauguin found himself at the point where the money that he had saved had been almost entirely spent. He was still completely unsuccessful at selling his pictures. His father, after the *coup d'état*, had turned to his wife's relations and so also now he determined to visit Copenhagen and trust that his wife's family, through their connections, would be able to find him an occupation that would allow him to earn his living, and at the same time to paint also. Mette was in favour of this move and encouraged her husband to make it.

Before leaving France a firm of awning-makers made Gauguin their Danish representative. He counted on obtaining contracts from the Danish railways as well as from private persons.

Mette and three of their children went by an earlier boat from Havre to Copenhagen, while Gauguin followed with the two other children a few days later.

Gauguin was not a success with the Danes. The relinquishing of his profitable work as an Exchange broker in Paris had already placed him in a vulnerable position with his wife's family, and his failure to secure any orders for sun blinds in the Danish capital further lowered him in their estimation. For the first time he was at the financial mercy of, to him, unsympathetic people, and the effect on his character was not to sweeten it. Detesting, as he did, the chief characteristics of the French bourgeoisie, the same tendencies in a nordic setting, stiffened by an un-Gallic prudery, made him even less tolerant. His temper quickened, although his underlying patience remained untouched. After an unsuccessful visit to a Copenhagen business man, who had finally refused him an order for his blinds and doubtless qualified in Gauguin's mind for the category of *imbécile*, he had the misfortune to find a glass of water at his hand and to throw this at his unwilling client's head. His reputation as a man with whom it was possible to

do business suffered as a result of this action and very quickly he was forced to give up the representing of the firm through lack of orders.

From having been coldly received he now found that he was treated with hostility, but this fact, instead of being a warning to him, seemed to provoke him into intentional acts that ruffled the accepted national prejudices of his hosts. With his mother-in-law he was at no time on good terms. With his sisters-in-law he was soon on equally difficult terms, and they appeared to do everything within their power to rouse Mette's hostility against him.

Gauguin treated his wife's family—he and Mette and their children were living in his mother-in-law's house—to long periods when he found nothing to say and when he ignored them and the inevitable proprieties and unavoidable civilities of daily life. He appeared to have one idea only and that was to stun the family's bourgeois friends. When, on one occasion, his wife had a tea party, he went into the room when she was receiving her friends, dressed only in bedroom slippers and a shirt. After greeting his wife's guests without embarrassment, he chose a book and retired.

Such events were of the greatest unpleasantness for his wife, and his change of character, or the revelation of an unsuspected side of it, affected her deeply. In Paris Huysmans had hailed him. Now he had quarrelled with him and he hailed him no longer. His savings were spent and they were living on the charity of her family. Gauguin's ability to succeed at everything he tried had not held good in Denmark. He had made enemies, even within his wife's family, and he appeared to have done so and to do so intentionally—and to enjoy observing the effect that his actions produced. Mette began to doubt her husband's gifts as a painter. She had heard the initial praise, but now there was no one to praise her husband and no one to buy his pictures. Her national prudery and reserve that a number of years of married life in France had overcome now returned to her in the surroundings that she knew and

appreciated best. She began to think again, as the rest of the family thought, along the same lines and in the same grooves. In Gauguin's clothes, that were no longer new, she saw the outward signs of his failure.

Mette determined to earn money herself and she began to give lessons in French to diplomatic students and to translate French novels into Danish, choosing principally the works of Emile Zola. Gauguin, disgusted by his attempted work and his failure at it and by the atmosphere of the surroundings in which he was living, could not prevent her, for he was at last entirely without money himself, and money was a vital necessity for them and their five children. The pictures in his collection of Impressionist paintings were as difficult to sell as were his own.

When the family had been nearly eighteen months in Denmark, Gauguin's name and reputation became very seriously compromised.

Sea-bathers—and both sexes took segregated sea-baths in a state of nature—were possibly to be heard, but a convention disallowed that they should be seen, by others. To Gauguin's Latin mind this was incomprehensible. If a woman chose to bathe naked in an exposed place where those walking along the coast could see her, he could not understand that an unwritten law should make her invisible to the eyes of such passers-by. With the disastrous infinity of leisure that he possessed, he had never attempted to keep to this fiction that the Danes enjoined, and if there were anything to watch, he watched. He had one day the misfortune to notice, as he was walking along a road by the sea, the wife of a Copenhagen clergyman bathing with her daughter and to stop in his promenading to observe and to admire. The child, running out of the undressing hut, saw him watching the retreating naked figure of her mother. Her cries caused the frightened woman to return to the hut instead of to the safety of the sea, exposing herself even more than would have been the case if the child had not seen, nor the unwritten law been in operation.

Gauguin continued to look, greatly aggravating his crime. A serious scandal ensued. Gauguin, uselessly, pleaded Latin logic. He had contravened, and this he did not deny in his attempt to expose the stupidity of a long-standing national tradition. His mother and his sisters-in-law upbraided Mette in their access of bourgeois indignation. They found him an embarrassment to the family and unwilling even to apologise for his crime.

From this time, his position in his mother-in-law's house was extremely difficult. To his pride it was insupportable. He could seldom find Mette alone when he wished to speak with her, for her sisters seemed always to be in her room, talking endlessly, lecturing her with their ideas and condemnations.

The circumstances in which he now found himself provoked him into an unjust jealousy of the admiration in which his wife was held by those students to whom she taught French. His mother-in-law surprised them in a bitter altercation that she did not attempt to settle. There was nothing further for which he might hope in Denmark. He had failed, and he could tolerate his mother-in-law's household and the mentality that ruled it no longer.

The alternative, the only possible solution, was for him to return to Paris and to endeavour to create for himself there a position similar to the one that he had hoped to create in Denmark. As he was now without money it was impossible for him to consider taking all his family back with him to France. He had the right to do so, if he chose, but Mette and he were in agreement that it would be more sensible for him to leave first. When he had found work, and could afford to send for her and for the children, he would do so. It was to be a short separation, they both imagined and hoped. None of his pictures had sold while he had been away from Paris, but with his return he felt certain that he would be able to push their sale. Buyers could not hold off for ever.

In June of this year, 1885, Gauguin left Copenhagen by train for Paris, taking with him his eldest son, Clovis, now nearly eleven years old. He gave Mette all his property and the money that he received from one of his brothers-in-law who bought his collection of pictures. The four younger children remained behind with Mette who continued, while she awaited the call to Paris, to endeavour to render the books of Emile Zola palatable to an easily scandalised northern reading public.

"I also have observed the north of Europe," Gauguin wrote in later years, "and the best thing I found there was most certainly not my mother-in-law, but the game that she cooked so admirably."

Chapter Seven

THE SEPARATION FROM METTE

On his arrival in Paris, Paul Gauguin had at last obtained full control of his days. Certain of his friends, whom he had possibly not consulted, stigmatised his original action as folly. His plans had not succeeded as he had intended, but his optimism that they would, and his belief that they should, had not deserted him. If he were to be forced to pay a full price for his liberty, he was prepared to do so. He had great patience with circumstances, when great patience was necessary. If he were capable of hasty actions, it was when an *imbécile* crossed his path.

Gauguin returned with Clovis to Vaugirard and lived for a time in the Impasse Frémin, near his old home in the rue des Fourneaux. The price he was forced to pay for his liberty at this time was very high indeed. He had arrived in Paris with very little money and to earn enough for the food that he required for his young son and for himself he was forced to take any work that he could obtain, but his pride now made him avoid those persons and places that he had known when he had worked in the rue Laffitte.

His pride was strong. He did not ask those whom he had once known, or helped, for charity. "Is pride a fault and should it be developed?" he asked in a little book that he later wrote and dedicated to his daughter. "I believe it should be. It is still the best thing for fighting the human beast within us."

During the second half of 1885, Gauguin and Clovis ate only when Gauguin had been fortunate enough to earn money from finding work. There was nothing that he was not prepared to undertake while he endeavoured to sell his pictures and to begin to found the little security that was required before he could expect Mette and his other four children to be able to join him.

In the meantime he had the consolation of knowing that they, at least, were not ever in actual need, and that long before the puritanical environment of his mother-in-law's house had begun to have a formative effect on his children's character he should be in a position to send for them and begin again their life in common.

Gauguin had a great love for his eldest boy, but this purblind affection, that had allowed him to bring him to Paris, proved in no way an advantage to either of them. For his room in the Impasse Frémin he was able to hire a small bed for the boy and a mattress for himself, but when the winter came he had no spare money for the purchase of blankets or coal for the heating of the room. "We freeze at night . . ." he wrote to Mette. "For a month it has been cold again, snowing. I sleep on a plank, wrapped up in a travelling rug. However, the bothers of the day make up for the sleeplessness of the night."

Clovis had no shoes and no toys. He caught chicken-pox. Gauguin had left the Impasse Frémin for a little apartment in the rue Cail, near the Gare du Nord. He was still only able to earn money with the greatest difficulty and the boy's illness was an unexpected tax on him that made his daily life unbelievably harder. But Gauguin faced this crisis with courage and great patience, and after a while the boy got better.

To Mette he wrote: "You are wrong to think that I am discouraged . . . but I hope one day to earn enough to be free and above all undisturbed. Do not be upset if you are unable to be of help to me. I ask nothing from you. When the little one fell ill with chicken-pox I had twenty centimes in my pocket, and for three days we had been eating dry bread on credit. Distracted, I had the idea of asking a railway advertising company for work as a billposter. My bourgeois appearance made the Director laugh, but I told him in all earnestness that I had a sick child and that I wanted work. So I pasted advertisements for five francs a day. During this time Clovis was in bed, feverish, and in the evenings I went home

to look after him. This work lasted three weeks and, to-day, the Director of the Company has taken me on as an inspector and secretary for 200 francs a month. They have, it seems, found me intelligent. . . . Do not worry about the little one; he is getting better and better, and I am not thinking of sending him back. On the contrary I hope, as my affairs improve, to take more of the children. It is my right, you know."

Mette had left her mother's house in Copenhagen and was living with the four children in a house of her own. The money that she was earning was enough for her needs, but she complained to her husband of her misfortunes. Gauguin could not see that she was so ill-placed, comparing the conditions under which he and his unfortunate eldest son were forced to live with hers. ". . . . I try to agree with you," he told her, "and I must say that I do not see that your position is as miserable as you say . . . you see people and, as you like the society of women and of your compatriots, you can amuse yourself sometimes. You enjoy the benefits of marriage without having the bother of a husband. What more do you want, if it is not a little money?"

Clovis had long ago realised that his father was unable to provide him with the cakes or sweets that he had had in the past and no longer asked endlessly for them. He learned to go to bed without playing after their dinner of bread and cold meat. Gauguin was not blind to the gameness of his son. "His heart and his reasoning are now those of a grown-up person. He grows from day to day but is not in very good health."

Mette may well have felt anxious for her eldest son but she was fully occupied with looking after the four younger children. There was nothing that, at the moment, she could do. Only later, when she had been separated from Clovis for two years, was she able to get him back.

At the beginning of the following year Gauguin placed Clovis in a boarding school in a Paris suburb where the boy would be better looked after. Gauguin had undergone such privations that his attitude to Mette and towards his own life had

undergone a profound change. The harshness of circumstances had made him harsh, and his character had taken on a temporary but cynical bitterness that discoloured the letters that he wrote to his wife and that made him sometimes unjust. He had not, up till this time, ceased to love his wife and to work and hope for the moment when she would be able to rejoin him with the other children. While in Paris he had painted as often and as much as he had been able. He had with difficulty sold one small picture, a Jongkind, from the few that he had retained from his own collection. Of his own paintings he had sold nothing. He had only known disappointments, sales that did not materialise or work of which nothing came. The struggle had had its effect on his character and a melodramatic effect on his thoughts.

"I have become very hard and I only feel disgust for everything that is past. Let the children forget me, I have become indifferent to that now. Besides, I cannot see the possibility of seeing them again, and pray God that death takes us all. It would be the best present that He could make us. Do not worry about your faults being pardoned. I have for a long time forgotten all about that; even your sister, who was the most mischievous and the most stupid woman in what happened, appears to me now like any other woman. I have always been wrong to believe in goodness. Everything is forgotten." He had been obliged to spend a month in a hospital after placing Clovis in his school. Mette was treated to further insights into his despair. "Unfortunately I have come out. I thought it was all up this time, but bah! my devilish iron constitution got the upper hand. During my nights in the hospital I thought gaily of all the solitude that surrounded me! I have accumulated in me such bitterness that, really, if you came here now, I do not think that I would receive you, unless malevolently. You have a hearth and almost certainly some black bread every day. Preserve that preciously. It is paradise compared with here."

Although Gauguin had throughout these months avoided

seeing any of his former business friends from the rue Laffitte, he made one exception in favour of his former office colleague, Emile Schuffenecker. Schuffenecker possessed a little money and had been a pupil at Colarossi's school, after leaving Bertin's. He lived with his wife in the suburb of Montrouge. Gauguin found him a congenial companion and that he was gradually being won over to the Impressionist movement. He readily accepted his occasional hospitality. He gave him the remaining canvases of his collection to store in his *pavillon* in the rue Boulard, the two Cézannes and the Pissarro that for years he could not bring himself to sell however much he was in need of money for food.

Emile Schuffenecker belonged to the type of man on whose kindness it is ever easy to impose and Gauguin's connection with him and his wife was not, after a while, to prove entirely to Gauguin's credit. But as a natural imposee, Schuffenecker was to prove for several years a blessing to Gauguin and to demonstrate his continual willingness to help a stronger character which, with its newly won bitterness, could be as ruthless as it could be oblivious to repeated kindnesses.

Gauguin began experimenting with painted ceramics, objects that won the admiration of Schuffenecker who declared that they were works of art "but possibly too artistic to be sold."

Mette had reacted to her husband's repeated descriptions of his life of misery in a tragic, hysterical letter. "Your last letter is strange," he replied, "with your suicides, and your love that has just appeared as if by magic. In any case, from a distance love is not expensive. It is just like me, now that you are no longer there I feel that I am going to love you and that you will see in ten years that we shall be obliged to see each other again, or be consumed where we stand. So now not a single one of the children is allowed to speak French! Your family must be pleased at winning all along the line. All of you Danes! A thousand kisses to all of you whom I adore."

Chapter Eight

PONT-AVEN AND PARIS

After more than six months Gauguin could no longer bear the misery of his life in Paris and he decided to leave for the country, choosing a small town near the sea, Pont-Aven, near Lorient in the Finistère district of Brittany, where there was a colony of painters and where the cost of living was reported to be low. He had, at last, a little money from the sale of a few pictures, but not enough to be able to take Clovis with him. To Mette he wrote reassuringly: "I received, the other day, news of Clovis. It seems that he is as well as it is possible to imagine. I am in need of so much, and if I had had the money I would have brought him here. The poor boy will not have had any holidays, but one can only do what one can in this world . . . It is extraordinary how well I am in the middle of all this bother, I have never had so much energy. When I do fall, it will be doubtless all of a sudden."

Certain of those who knew Gauguin well and who wrote later about him have imagined that he was the son of a Breton father and that by choosing Brittany he was fulfilling a desire to go to the country of his ancestors, which was not at all the case. Some have seen in this move a determination to seek out, in what he imagined to be a country of archaic customs, a new atmosphere and surroundings different from the over-civilised world that he knew. Charles Morice has said that when he enquired the reason, Gauguin replied that it was "sadness" that had caused him to go there. After the appalling conditions under which he had had to live in Paris it is unlikely that the "sadness" of his condition or the supposed "sadness" of Brittany would have been a determining factor in his choice. The undeniable mournfulness of the Brittany landscape that he came to appreciate may have influenced him in his desire to return there a second time, and it is more

probable that he meant just this when speaking to Morice of "la tristesse," and not that it was the reason for his original choice. The fact that he heard that at Pont-Aven there was a good *pension* which was cheap and where he would find painters was enough reason. Pissarro, moreover, knew Brittany well.

Gauguin's first visit to Pont-Aven lasted throughout the spring and summer and autumn of 1886. Most of the painters who went to the little town, at that time undiscovered by the thousands of holidaymakers who now frequent it, stayed at a *pension* near the bridge over the river Aven owned by a vigorous Breton woman, Madame Marie-Jeanne Gloanec, who charged her guests from 55 to 70 francs—between £2 to £3—a month for their bed and board.

Pont-Aven is placed near the mouth of the river Aven, and at that time its water-mills were its chief characteristic. It was neat in a typical Breton way and consisted of old and picturesque houses built on the narrow ground between the foot of the hills and the little river with its clear water and occasional small cascades.

During all or part of this time Emile Schuffenecker was also at Pont-Aven and Concarneau, a seaside town near by. Emile Bernard, the painter, who later was to know Gauguin well and frequently to quarrel with him, has described how after having walked from Paris, he saw on the beach at Concarneau a painter at work. This man, who was Schuffenecker, spoke with praise of Gauguin's work and when Bernard reached Pont-Aven, where he also put up at Madame Gloanec's *pension,* he introduced himself to Gauguin as Schuffenecker had told him to do. He was not well received. Gauguin may have sensed that something in the young man's character which was later to enrage him so much. An American painter, Granchy Taylor, further sponsored Bernard, but for the moment no particular sympathy was felt by either of them for the other. Gauguin's painting, furthermore, did not at this time interest Emile Bernard. When they met again, during Gauguin's second visit to Pont-Aven, they were to begin an acquaintanceship

that was to drag on through many argumentative and acrimonious years, a comedy of assertion and denial in the responsibility of who had, in fact, influenced whom.

Gauguin's mind was still prejudiced by his sufferings and he was unable to forget the imagined harm that Mette had done him. Even when she wrote to tell him of a threatened cancer operation, he was unable to wish that he could undergo the suffering in her place without telling her that it was in spite of this harm that she had done to him and that he would never forget. In his mind, from now on, the faults of her family, of her sister and his mother-in-law had become fixed on her. He sold nothing in Brittany. "Money troubles discourage me totally and I would like to see the end of them. Still, let us be resigned and let come what will. And perhaps one day, when my art will have opened the eyes of everyone, some enthusiastic soul will pick me out of the brook . . . Let us hope that next winter will be better. . . . I will kill myself rather than live like a beggar as I did last winter."

As was from the earliest time the case, incorrect information about Gauguin soon began to be offered. In Pont-Aven it was said that he had come from Paris, where he had had a little house and garden near the Observatory in Montparnasse, after having spent 40,000 francs, the profits of a banking deal, on the cultivation of "rare roses." As Gauguin never willingly spoke of his private life it is easy to see how a little real information was obliged to go a long way and how it suffered from exaggeration and distortion.

During this year, Gauguin's name was again heard in the rue Laffitte, but as an exhibitor in the eighth Impressionist Exhibition that happened to be held in a gallery in that street. He sent nineteen canvases, work that he had done at Rouen and in Denmark, and more recently in Paris and at Pont-Aven. But the ideas that had been developing in his mind since he had left Bertin's two years before, were brought by it, finally, to the foreground. He had been associated with the Impressionists officially since he had first exhibited with them

six years before, but his theories on painting had been gradually developing and advancing along lines that were heterodox to the accepted concept of the group. He could not be satisfied with so limited a palette. And he was a *master* already in his own estimation, with a certain number of ungrateful disciples. He found that he no longer wished to belong to a group but to break away, as he had in practice already done, to develop in the way that he chose.

He returned to Paris in the winter. The conditions of his life were no different from those of the winter before, in spite of his hopes and his declared refusal to face such conditions again. These uncertain and miserable days made work for him extremely hard.

Among the galleries was one, the Goupil, that was managed by a Dutchman, Theodore Van Gogh. This dealer had an elder brother, Vincent, who arrived in Paris for the first time a few months before Gauguin's return from Pont-Aven. He was a painter, after having been a schoolmaster and an evangelist. For some years Theo had supported him entirely.

Theo Van Gogh was the only dealer who kept paintings by the Impressionists on permanent exhibition in his gallery, but only those were represented who had won a certain recognition. Manet and Monet and Pissarro figured there, but as yet none of the younger men. This was, however, not due to any prejudice of Theo Van Gogh's, but because he was manager, only, of the gallery, and those above him would not yet allow the inclusion of Gauguin or Cézanne. His brother Vincent's work was known only to a few painters in Paris. It had been shown nowhere.

The effect which the work of the Impressionists had on that of Vincent Van Gogh was to transform it. He had striven before to paint individually, but with an academic palette. The colour theories of the new movement liberated him from the use of brown shadows, and the hidden threat of coming insanity prompted him to an astonishing outburst of energy.

For Gauguin, Vincent Van Gogh developed a deep personal affection that was felt by few of his other friends. It was an admiration, like Schuffenecker's, which Gauguin's strength of character was able to provoke from these men of a lesser decision and drive. Van Gogh admired Gauguin's fearlessness. He did not see the latent violence of his character, he did not feel the bitterness of his attitude towards his own life, nor his restlessness, nor his disgust at the inappreciation of the *imbéciles* who composed public opinion and who cluttered the professions of art-critic and art-dealer. He appreciated the patience that Gauguin showed in the face of his own poverty. He admired the originality of his work.

Gauguin, in his turn, accepted Van Gogh's admiration as he had accepted Schuffenecker's, but whereas it was evident to him that his old business colleague had little talent he was aware of Van Gogh's potential genius. Van Gogh, through his brother's generosity, belonged to the small band of those painters—Seurat, Cézanne, Toulouse-Lautrec and Degas among them—who were not poor. After a few months, however, the friendship between the two was forced temporarily to cease.

Gauguin at about this time received an offer of employment in Oceania as a plantation labourer, but the prospect of going so far away was more then than he cared to face. His conviction that he would one day earn enough by painting to be able to give Mette and his children a home was still unundermined. But it was difficult during the cold of the winter for him to forget that there existed in the world places where coal was not required and where there was no such thing as an *imbécile*. If Oceania were too far away, there were places nearer Europe. Panama, then in the news owing to the activities of a French company that was endeavouring to construct a canal from the Atlantic to the Pacific, appeared to him to be a possible destination. He heard also of a small island in the West Indies, Tobago, near Trinidad, where he hoped that he could find the refuge he wanted. To be for a time even further from his family than he was in Paris was an unpleasant thought

to him but he imagined at least that he would not have to live in either of these places in a hand to mouth condition as in Paris. He knew that he would find something entirely new to paint—new people and a new landscape—and he hoped to regain the energy that his misery and his disappointments were beginning to destroy. On his return, the new work that he would have to show would establish him, he believed, and might possibly sell. In March he made up his mind to leave France by a West Indian mail-boat on the tenth of the following month.

Mette, whose work in Copenhagen left her little time to write to her husband, was informed of his decision. It was nearly two years since they had been forced to separate, and Gauguin's lack of immediate success in France had obliged her to resign herself to a longer separation than they had at first imagined would be necessary. Her husband's letters, with their strange bitterness and the proofs of his changed mind and his frequent unjust sayings, left her little to say to him in return. "I cannot continue to live here on debts, an appalling weakening existence, and I am going to try anything that will bring me a better conscience. Why do you remain so long without writing? I think I have indeed the right to have news of you from time to time. My letters are not very gay, but you understand I have had so much to suffer that I have almost reached the human limit. Before leaving for the unknown, I would be very glad to have news of you, as a substitute for an embrace. I am leaving with just enough money for the voyage and I shall arrive in America without any. . . . I do not yet know what I shall do there, but what I want, above all, is to escape from Paris, which is a desert for a poor man."

As the day for his departure approached he reviewed his love for Mette, trying to blame her less but not always with success. He was, in spite of this, going away on a journey of unknown duration and success, in an endeavour to bring back with him something that would contribute materially to hastening their permanent reunion. He found it necessary to take her again into his confidence over his sufferings. "And as well as all

these miseries, there is the privation of affection, a broken, hopeless life. For you say that you did love me: remember how you treated me. Now you say you are very changed and to your advantage, which I am happy to believe. . . . If one day, I *succeed* . . . will you bring to my hearth, hell, daily disagreement? Is it love or hatred that you promise. . . .? *I know that you are really good and a little noble,* so I count on your good sense. I cannot go to see Clovis, not having payed his fees, but nowadays my heart is like my stomach, iron against all suffering. A kiss to all. PAUL (who loves you still); it is silly, but that is how it is!"

Still in the same mood, he wrote after receiving news of her at last. "Your letter allows me to see many things you do not admit, for instance that the affection of your family has not replaced advantageously that of your husband. And how would it be if I were wicked and if I had abandoned you for ever? Many others would have done so in my position, without a pang of conscience, since your family encouraged the separation. . . . I have no longer any resentment against you. . . . I hope to see ourselves reunited one of these days, but I assure you *that there will be no one of your family between us two,* or for good and all I shall become a wild beast."

Gauguin's announcement to Mette of his intention of leaving Europe brought her to Paris at the beginning of April. Her husband was to be away indefinitely and she wished to have Clovis with her again. The circumstances of their meeting, however, were too full of economic and mental worries for them to be able to become properly reconciled to each other. It is not recorded whether Mette saw Gauguin off on his journey or whether she left with Clovis for Copenhagen before that time. It has been said that the unfortunate Clovis stayed at his school until June of that year, but it is more probable that his mother took him back with her almost at once, for there would be little for her to do in Paris when her husband had gone.

Chapter Nine

THE FIRST ESCAPE: PANAMA AND MARTINIQUE

Gauguin decided, finally, against going to the little island of Tobago. In the company of Charles Laval, a young painter whom he had met at Pont-Aven, and who was more studious than robust, he sailed for Panama, the ship touching at Guadeloupe and Martinique, the two islands in the Lesser Antilles that were colonies of France.

His first act on arriving in Central America was to write to Mette, to tell her of the voyage. Martinique had especially impressed him and he regretted having taken a ticket as far as Panama. He determined to return there as soon as he could earn enough money for the fare. He found that the value of land in the territory through which the canal was being constructed had risen to a price of 5*s*. a metre and that there was little chance of settling on it. The only possibility of earning his fare back to Martinique was to take employment as a labourer with the Canal Company. He hoped that only two months of this work, for it was well paid, would enable him to save one month's wages, 600 francs. He and Charles Laval were given employment. Their hours of digging were from 5.30 in the morning until six in the evening in tropical conditions of sun and rain. At night they were consumed by the vast quantities of mosquitoes that swarmed in the lakes and swamps.

But before the two months were finished the Company, on orders from France, dismissed a number of workmen. Gauguin and Laval were among them. The Company was in difficulties and there was no prospect of further immediate employment for them in Panama.

This misfortune did not prevent Gauguin and Laval from reaching Martinique, where they hired a small house among the sugar plantations on the outskirts of St. Pierre, the capital,

that lay at the foot of the intermittently active volcano of Mont Pelée. "During the good season," de Rotonchamp has written, "that is to say during the first months of the year, the sky of this island . . . is of a pureness and a transparence that leave the much-praised brightness of Italy far behind. In the middle of the day, light clouds disturb the blue calm but fleetingly, but the rising and the setting of the sun produce in the sky and on the sea the most magnificent and rich effects of light." Round the painters' house extended compact plantations of sugar-cane—among which, half naked, labourers moved, Indians, Chinese, or Negroes. ". . . From the trees and bushes hung oranges . . . lemons, so common there that the trees grow wild in the thickets, coco-nuts . . . guavas . . . corossols, a large fruit of an agreeable freshness, *sapotilles* . . . and also mangos and bananas. In the woods, infested by the yellow and black trigonocephalus snake and, at night, by fireflies, grow with all their exotic vigour the gaïac, mahogany and rose-wood. The tamarind enriches the avenues and, in damp places, the slender lace of the bamboo waves. Above all this vegetation rise up tragic hills, of which many carry the signs of having been volcanoes."

Gauguin was able to write cheerfully to Mette at last. "I cannot tell you my enthusiasm for the life in the French colonies. With a little money one can be happy. . . . A white man has difficulty here in preserving his chastity, for there is no lack of Potiphar's wives, who go as far as using charms in order to entrap one. The day before yesterday a young negress of sixteen came to offer me a split guava, squashed at one end. I was going to eat it when a coloured lawyer, who happened to be there, took the fruit from me and threw it away. 'One must not eat fruit without knowing from where it comes. That fruit was charmed. The negress had squashed it on her breast and, inevitably, you would have been at her disposition afterwards.' I thought he was joking. Not at all. The unfortunate mulatto believed what he said. Now that I have

been warned, I shall not fall, and you may be easy about my virtue."

Gauguin, however, did not long retain his early enthusiasm for the island. Malaria that he had contracted in Panama developed and he and Charles were ill periodically with the fever.

The heat was intense during the hot season, varying in a day from 20 to 40 degrees centigrade. The humidity was exhausting to all Europeans, and yellow fever, the worst scourge of the island, was a perpetual danger, for it had not yet been conquered. The colours and tones of the island, the luxuriance of the forests, were forgotten in the moment when the two painters were overcome with illness.

His letters to Mette became harsh and bitter again. "I saw you in April with pleasure but I noticed in your character the same points that make our life together difficult. Always the same revolt, more violent than ever and always more sensitive to flattery than to truth." And again: "My poor Mette, I am sorry that I am not dead. It seems that since I left Copenhagen everything has gone wrong. It is true after all that nothing good happens when the family is separated." And: "If only we detested each other! (hatred above all), but you begin to feel the need of a husband just when it is impossible . . . Until we meet, my dear wife, I embrace you and love you (I ought to hate you when I look back and when I see the wicked passions that separated us. Since that day everything has gone from bad to worse. . . .)"

Gauguin had worked eagerly at the beginning and had put into his palette colours that he had not used before. His greens had become brighter. At last also it had been necessary for him to use a near-black, a colour that was anathema to the orthodox Impressionists, in his painting of the flesh of the negresses and mulattos of the island. From Emile Bernard he was later to learn the composition of a denser black, with the use of prussian-blue. That time was yet to come, and he was forced to do what he could with the colours that he had with

him. But the light of the Antilles was not that of Brittany or of anywhere in Europe, and once he had seen colours in that brighter and purer light he could never paint again as he had done before, nor be satisfied with the less demanding colours of the sights and scenes and landscapes of the non-tropical world.

While Gauguin was able to throw off the attacks of malaria with ease, Charles Laval suffered increasingly from the fever. His condition became more serious as time went by and a climax was reached when, as a result of the depression brought on by his illness, he made an attempt to kill himself, an attempt that Gauguin was fortunately able to frustrate. But Gauguin himself developed dysentery and this his system had more difficulty in overcoming. The climate and their illnesses made it necessary for them to leave the island as soon as was possible.

Mette had not written again after the bitter letter that Gauguin's depression and his poverty had allowed him to send to her. This lack of news of his family was difficult for him to bear and he wrote again. "Of all the ills that you have caused me, that of silence is the worst, and I shall arrive in France devoured by fever and anxiety. . . . It is useless to tell you of all the miseries of hunger that I am enduring. . . ."

By January of the next year, 1888, the two painters were again in Paris, having had themselves repatriated. Gauguin's first attempt at escape from Europe had lasted no longer than nine months.

Chapter Ten

PARIS AND PONT-AVEN AGAIN

On his return from Martinique, Gauguin had finished with Impressionism. He had observed colours that he had never before seen in Europe and that he had not had the means of reproducing from his limited palette. Veridian, vermilion and gamboge had become necessities. They were naturally not unknown to him, but he had never realised their necessity nor their proper use before. Furthermore, to paint the flesh of coloured people it had been necessary to use a range of colours forbidden to the stricter theorists among his former colleagues. With his nature that did not allow him half-measures, and being determined to go his own way, he denied Impressionism completely, an attitude that strengthened throughout the remaining years of his life until the denial that he wrote shortly before his death borders on unreasonable violence. "The Impressionists searched with their eye and not in the mysterious centre of their imagination; and from there fell into scientific reasons. They are the official [painters] of to-morrow, terrible in a different way from the official ones of yesterday. . . . The art of these latter has been thorough, has produced and will still produce masterpieces, while the official ones of to-morrow are in a vacillating craft badly steered and incomplete. When they speak of their art, what is it? An art, purely superficial, nothing but coquetting, purely material; imagination does not inhabit it."

As soon as he reached Paris, Gauguin went to see Emile Schuffenecker at Montrouge. He needed somewhere to live and he had no money. Schuffenecker had, besides, been looking after the few possessions that he had not taken with him to Panama, and the three last pictures from his collection.

Emile Schuffenecker asked Gauguin to stay with him and his wife for a time and to share his studio with him. The *pavillon* in the rue Boulard was not large, being separated from the

road by a small garden, and contained on the ground floor the sitting-room and the room that served Schuffenecker as his studio and which was, in fact, the dining-room transformed.

Gauguin, impelled by his new feeling of independence, rapidly made himself at home. He was thin after his double illness, but the adequate food that the Schuffeneckers gave him soon enabled him to recover his health.

Many incidents have been related that claim to show Gauguin's brutal disregard for the ordinary conventions of life, and some of them refer to this period when he was Schuffenecker's guest. He is reported to have excluded his host from the studio—by shutting the door in his face—when he wished to show Theo Van Gogh the work that he had done in Martinique and to have stood by in angry, almost violent silence when a visitor, Jean Dolent the poet, admired one of Schuffenecker's canvases. Another piece of gossip attributes to him the vain stupidity of becoming enraged when Schuffenecker, during his absence, showed to a potential buyer some of his Martiniquan canvases. This crime he is said to have visited on himself by throwing the buyer out of the *pavillon* and by locking himself in the communal studio for twenty-four hours. Only on the following day, when his fury is supposed to have quietened, did he permit Schuffenecker to enter the studio again. Whatever the truth about his behaviour may have been, it is impossible not to grant that such stories gained currency because of their possibility, for he did not suffer fools gladly, nor those who interfered in his affairs any more amiably.

Gauguin, respited for a few weeks from the worries of daily hunger and illness, worked at various new projects. The great ceramist Chaplet was a neighbour and friend of Schuffenecker and Gauguin worked with him for a while. He had for a long time wished to make ceramics, and he made the most of this opportunity that had presented itself. Chaplet fired for him several pots and figurines. This artist, who has been compared with the great 16th-century ceramist, Bernard Palissy, was held

by Gauguin in the greatest admiration, "Chaplet . . . who had genius" being the unalterable expression that he used when speaking of him. A ruse of Chaplet's permitted Gauguin to see one of his statuettes on exhibition in the Salon of 1887. The ceramist placed it in his own showcase and threatened to withdraw the whole exhibit when angry protests were made to him.

At this time Gauguin met the man who was to become his firmest friend and the only one with whom he corresponded regularly later when he lived in Oceania. Daniel de Monfreid was a painter whom Schuffenecker had known at the Colarossi studio. He had money and a small yacht on which he spent about half of every year. But Gauguin's friendship with him was not to become really intimate until later.

Gauguin also arranged with Theo Van Gogh, the manager of the Gallery of Boussod and Valadon, who had taken over the Goupil business from Theo's uncle in Montmartre, for his first one-man show. In two small rooms on the entresol were exhibited his new Martiniquan paintings and a few earlier canvases that he had done in Brittany, as well as some pottery and ceramics. Although it did not meet with any outstanding comment a few canvases were sold, and he was at last in possession of a little money.

He had written to Mette to tell her of his return. "The duty of an artist is to work in order to gain strength. This duty I have accomplished, and everything that I have brought back with me finds only admirers. But, I am not getting on. . . . Although it is very difficult, it is possible that one day I shall occupy the place that I deserve. To whom shall you turn then; and those who give you advice, who are not those who have to pay, will they still tell you that your place is not beside your husband? Whatever may be invented, nothing better will be made than the union of the family. . . . My poor Mette, I am very afraid that we are in the same position as at the beginning."

Having again enough money to live by himself, Gauguin left the Schuffeneckers for a small studio that he had found in

the Impasse du Saint-Gothard, near the Avenue du Montsouris, in the XIVth *arrondissement*. It was cheap, the rent being no more than 400 francs a year, but Gauguin only kept it for three months. He was determined to leave Paris again for Brittany, but before going there he went to Copenhagen to see Mette and his children.

Whatever opinion Gauguin may have had of his mother-in-law—we know that it was very definite—he could not have expected the icy reception that he received. It was three years since he had left Madame Gad's house to his own, and to everyone's, relief. He had seen Mette in Paris when she had come to fetch Clovis and although they had not met without some recrimination, Mette had not shown the aloofness that she now displayed. The fear of the effect that his visit to his wife might have had induced Mette's family to renew the pressure on her that they had so successfully exercised three years before. Her mother, in particular, succeeded in making her fear rather than look forward to Gauguin's arrival, and when he arrived she received him very coldly. Gauguin found it even impossible to see her alone, for the uppermost fear in her mother's mind was, it seemed, that as a result of this meeting another child might be born to them and add to the expenses of the household.

His children, with the exception of Clovis, had little recollection of him. But the journey had one happy result that he had not foreseen, the discovery of his daughter Aline who was now nearly eleven years old. She had been too young when he had left Copenhagen to be able to show that she was capable of understanding him or at least making him feel that she wished to understand his life. For Gauguin the remembrance of his daughter was a help and after her death a comfort to him for the rest of his life.

Mette had merely repeated during this visit that she would not come to him unless he were able to promise her and their children a suitable home. It is impossible not to see the reason and sense of this, although, had she wished to rejoin him, her

family could not have prevented her, physically, from doing so, and in Paris it might have been possible for her to continue to earn money as she had done in Copenhagen. But with five children it was too doubtful a proposition and it is not possible to blame her for her refusal. Gauguin's hope that they still all might one day be reunited in Paris was to continue with him for some years yet, but he returned to Paris with an even greater hatred for the Gad family than he had had before. "If only Mette had been an orphan . . ." he said, and it cannot be doubted that if she had been his life would have been a different story.

On his return to Paris he did not stay there long, but went again to Pont-Aven. To Mette he wrote: "On the point of being launched, I must make a supreme effort for my painting, and in Brittany, at Pont-Aven, I am going to paint for six months. I pray you, do not throw up hope altogether and make every effort to wait another year. . . . I know that you will only believe in me when I sell well, but it is an opinion that one must keep secret from the public. I know that this cursed painting is an affliction for you, but since the evil is done one must take its side and try to get something out of it for the future."

Gauguin returned to Pont-Aven after a little less than two years' absence. He had come to various decisions since his first visit which had culminated in his break with the Impressionists. The academic painters, who composed the greater part of the guests at Madame Gloanec's *pension,* in their natural ignorance still reproached Gauguin and the few other independent painters who were there with Impressionism, a now time-honoured label for anything that found disapproval in the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Gauguin's intimate circle consisted of four men—Laval, Moret, Emile Bernard and de Chamaillard.

The academic painters were quite unanimous in their hatred of this "pestiferous" set, believing that those who had other ideas than to paint pictures to resemble coloured daguerreotypes were obviously mentally unstable and would be better locked

up. The group ate in a small room that led out of the larger dining-room of the *pension* where the orthodox ate. It was referred to by the rest as the *Succursale de Charenton*, Charenton being the best known lunatic asylum in France. A drawing by Gauguin exists inscribed with these words that some diner from the larger room had considered witty to scrawl across it.

Among the academic painters who were there at the time the name of only one has been preserved, for the reason that he signed his canvases "G. de Maupassant." He may or may not have been the father of the great novelist, or any relation whatever, but his canvases found a ready sale among those who imagined that they were buying rare works by the author of *Boule de Suif*. This particular man threatened to leave the *pension* when Madame Gloanec wished to have some of Gauguin's paintings on the walls of the public rooms. To keep the peace in the *pension* another ruse was employed that enabled one of his canvases to be hung. Mademoiselle Bernard, Emile Bernard's sister, signed it with her name and "G. de Maupassant" imagined that he had had his way.

Another painter, Paul Sérusier, now entered the circle of the *pestiférés*. At the beginning a member of the academic group and a pupil at the Académie Julian in Paris, he did not, because of his orthodox environment, speak to the ill-viewed band who ate in the little dining-room until the end of 1888, but this was before Gauguin had left to join Vincent Van Gogh at Arles. By the spring of the next year he had been converted to them and surprised Gauguin, during the Universal Exhibition which produced the Eiffel Tower, by telling him so. In the Académie Julian he caused considerable consternation by introducing Pierre Bonnard, Edouard Vuillard and Maurice Denis, among others, to the new theories which Gauguin was expounding and which were to lead to the movement called *Synthetism*.

Gauguin was flattered by the position that he had been able to assume at Pont-Aven. He told Mette of this as if he

had won over the whole of the academic coterie. If it were done in order to encourage her, Gauguin must be forgiven: "Here I work a lot and successfully. I am respected as the strongest painter in Pont-Aven; it is true that that does not give me a sou more. But perhaps it is a preparation for the future. In any case it gives me a respectable reputation, and everybody (American, English, Swedish, French) ask for my advice, which I am stupid enough to give, because actually one is made use of without just recognition."

The group which ate in the smaller dining-room, together with a few braver members of the academic section, spent the evenings in long discussions. Gradually, a new theory was evolved, and labelled *la Synthèse*. "Synthetism," says de Rotonchamp, "was nothing more than an intentional simplification of lines, forms and colours, a simplification having as its objective to give to expression a maximum of intensity through the suppression of everything that could lessen the effect. This method of interpretation was not, to tell the truth, a discovery, for, since the origins of painting, this simplification is the actual basis of decorative art, and, in particular, of the fresco and the stained glass window. There was even no innovation in applying it to easel pictures, for, without going back far in the history of art, Puvis de Chavannes . . . Corot and Ingres simplified . . . as well as Poussin. These masters and many others practised . . . synthesis without knowing it." Maurice Denis in his *Théories* defines the movement more concisely. "To synthetise is not necessarily to simplify in the sense of suppressing certain parts of the object: it is to simplify in the sense of rendering intelligible. It is in fact to . . . submit each picture to one dominant rhythm, to sacrifice, to subordinate, to generalise." For the following two years Gauguin enjoyed posing as the head of a movement of his own inventing; then his hatred of schools and labels made him deny it the pompous importance that certain literary critics were beginning to claim for it.

Chapter Eleven

ARLES

Gauguin had been in correspondence since his return from Martinique with Vincent Van Gogh who had in the meantime left Paris for Provence and was painting at Arles. He had also sent him a self-portrait. Gauguin had not yet completely recovered from the effects of the dysentery that had driven him from Martinique, and this had left him with a certain internal weakness that was slow to disappear.

The portrait of himself that he had sent to Arles upset Vincent, who saw in the colouring that Gauguin had employed a reflection of his ill state of health. Writing to his brother Theo in Paris he described the portrait as "not in the least like flesh. . . . It certainly gives me the impression of depicting a prisoner . . . but one may attribute that to his desire for wanting to paint a melancholy thing; the flesh in the shadows is lugubriously blued. . . . The thing that this portrait of Gauguin tells me above all is that he must not continue like that, that he must be encouraged, that he must become again the gayer Gauguin of the negresses."

Van Gogh developed a profound concern for Gauguin's health and for his general condition and for his state of mind. To his brother, Theo, for whom he had a great love and a very exceptional regard, he wrote regularly, and in a very complete way told him of every idea and thought that came to him. He was entirely dependent on Theo's financial help. Theo was on the other hand generous, and fortunately able to be so, and indulgent to Vincent's sometimes mild extravagances. In a series of letters written during this summer of 1888, he tells his brother of the progress he was making in persuading Gauguin to leave Brittany and join him in Arles. The tone of these letters is most moving, and his very real anxiety for Gauguin's welfare is a pathetic opening to their brief and tragic associa-

tion. Vincent had proposed to Gauguin that they should live and work together. Gauguin, however, for whom the journey was an expense that he could not afford, had counter-proposed that Van Gogh should join him and his group at Pont-Aven.

Theo was told: "I think a great deal about Gauguin, and I assure you that, in one way and another, whether it is he who comes, or I who go to him, we shall like, he and I, much the same subjects [for painting]. It remains that, provided we live on good terms and with the determination not to quarrel, we shall gain a stronger position in so far as concerns our reputations. Living alone right through, one lives like a madman, or a criminal, at least in appearance, and in reality a little also." The idea of going to Pont-Aven did not appeal to Vincent, who had heard of the interminable discussions and enmities of the Pension Gloanec. Neither did he wish to leave the light and colour of Provence for the sadder light of Brittany. "Now . . . I am not going to Pont-Aven," he tells Theo, "if it means that one has to live in the *pension* with those Englishmen and those people from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts with whom one argues every evening, a storm in a tea-cup."

There seems to have been a delay after Vincent's definite refusal to go to Pont-Aven before he heard again from Gauguin, for suddenly he wrote to Theo: "I am writing to you very hurriedly to tell you that I have just received a letter from Gauguin, who tells me that he has not written because he was working a great deal; he still says he is ready to come to the Midi as soon as his luck allows. . . . In the hope of living in a studio for us both with Gauguin, I would like to do a decoration for that studio. . . . It will be a symphony in blue and yellow." And a little later: "I have received a letter from Gauguin. . . . He says that his intestinal pains still continue, and he seems to me to be very depressed. He speaks of a hope that he has of finding a capital of six hundred thousand francs to finance an Impressionist picture-dealer, that he is going to explain his plan to you, and that he would like you to be at the head of this enterprise. I would not be surprised if this hope

were not a *fata morgana*, a mirage in the desert: the more one is in the soup, especially when one is ill, the more one thinks of such possibilities. I see, therefore, in this plan another definite proof that he is wasting his time, and that the best thing would be to put him on his feet as soon as possible." Gauguin had in fact conceived an idea for financing himself and other painters who had independent ideas and little money, and although his plan came to nothing, it was not to be the last time that he thought of a way of curing his now apparently chronic impecuniosity. In the same letter Van Gogh prepares his brother for the idea that he has in his head, that Gauguin should be invited to stay in Arles as a guest. ". . . I should therefore be very surprised if he were not happy to come, but the expenses of the hotel and of the journey are made the more difficult on account of the doctor's bill: so it will be very difficult. It seems to me that he ought to leave the debt unpaid and some pictures as a security. I was obliged to do the same thing in order to come to Paris." A little later he at last indicates to his brother his intention of offering Gauguin hospitality. ". . . He must eat, go for walks with me in the beautiful countryside . . . see the house as it is and as we shall make it, and finally take proper relaxation. He has certainly been living inexpensively, but it has made him ill until he cannot distinguish a gay tone from a sad one. Well! It is not worth while. It is high time that he came, and he will get better quickly; in the meantime, forgive me if I exceed my budget, I shall work the more."

Vincent was then living in a part of a small yellow-washed house with red-tiled floors in the Place Lamartine outside the old walls of Arles, and had spent much time and thought, and all his money, on decorating and furnishing the rooms for the day when Gauguin would be able to come. The two rooms on the ground floor were to be used as studios, while on the first floor, that was reached by a short staircase and a long corridor, were two small bedrooms, with high ceilings, that communicated. Vincent had painted the walls and furniture

himself, choosing the bright colours that he now used for his own canvases. In front of the house was the large square with old trees, crossed by roads of dust that the mistral blew into every crevice and through the vainly shuttered windows. At the back of the house, that was not colour-washed and that showed the grey stone of the walls, was a small yard, while past one side of the house a road led by a devious route to the railway station.

It was mid-October before Gauguin left Pont-Aven. There is no record of how long he intended to stay in Provence. It is probable that he had not considered any particular length of time but that he was prepared to see how the plan worked.

A great deal of gratuitous and ill-founded adverse criticism has been shown towards Gauguin for the treatment that he is supposed to have meted out to Van Gogh, for the mental suffering that he is supposed to have caused his companion in order to satisfy some sadistic pleasure of his own. Tradition has even found him guilty of Van Gogh's insanity. Later in his life, when Theo as well as Vincent was dead and other of his friends also, and as a result possibly of the events of this tragic visit to Arles, he acquired the reputation of being a man with the evil eye, an unlucky man for his friends, and a person with whom early death was the inevitable result of a close association.

Gauguin, at the end of his life, wrote down various recollections of this period. He had intended, some day, to write fully about Vincent, but he did not succeed in recording more than a few events of his visit. The record is of importance as evidence in determining whether Gauguin has been rightly accused of maltreating and of taunting Van Gogh. He was admittedly not an easy companion, but if he taunted Vincent there is no suggestion that he taunted any other of his friends, and the fair and even account that he gives of Van Gogh does not bear the mark of a man who is trying to justify the results of an action of which he feels himself guilty: it is rather the account of incidents by a man who did his best, under the

circumstances, to help a friend and prevent, when that was done, any unreasonable complications from coming into his own life. The tragedy, that obliged Gauguin to leave Arles so soon, took place two days before Christmas.

"It was in Arles that I went to meet Vincent Van Gogh, after numerous solicitations on his part. He wished, he said, to found the Studio of the Midi, of which I would be the chief. The poor Dutchman was so keen, so enthusiastic. But reading *Tartarin de Tarascon* had made him believe in an extraordinary *Midi* that should be expressed by jets of flame. And on his canvases chrome flared up, inundating the *mas*, the whole plain of the Camargue, with sunshine. We worked for some months with eagerness. That was little. It was a great deal. For a very long time I have wanted to write about Van Gogh, and I shall do so certainly one day when I feel like it: for the moment I am going to relate certain things about him, or rather about us, which are capable of correcting a falsehood that has circulated in certain circles. Chance, surely, had decreed that during my life several men who associated with me and who argued with me have become mad. The two brothers Van Gogh are among these and some people uncharitably, and others naïvely, have attributed their madness to me. Certainly some of us can have more or less ascendancy over their friends, but it is a long way from that to provoking madness. A long time after the catastrophe, Vincent wrote to me from the *maison de santé* where he was being looked after. He said: 'How lucky you are to be in Paris. That is where one may still find leaders, and surely you ought to consult a specialist to cure you of your madness. Are we not all mad?' The advice was good, which is why I did not follow it, out of perverseness undoubtedly. The readers of the *Mercure* were able to see in a letter from Vincent, published a few years ago, the insistence that he exercised to make me go to Arles to found after his plans a studio of which I was to be the director. I was working at that time at Pont-Aven in Brittany, and perhaps because my studies

were beginning to attach me to the place, or perhaps through a vague instinct I had sensed something abnormal, I resisted a long time until the day when, persuaded by Vincent's sincere measures of friendship, I went there.

"I arrived in Arles very early in the morning and I awaited daylight in an all-night café. The patron looked at me and said: 'You're the chum; I recognise you.' A portrait of myself that I had sent to Vincent was sufficient to explain the exclamation of this man. Showing him the portrait, Vincent had explained to him that it was a friend who was shortly coming.

"Neither too late, nor too early, I went to wake Vincent. The day was given over to getting myself installed, to a great deal of gossiping, to a walk for the purpose of admiring the beauties of Arles and the Arlésiennes, for whom, as a matter of fact, I was never able to become very enthusiastic.

"The next day we were at work; he continuing and I beginning. In the studio were a pair of large hobnailed boots, worn out and spattered with mud; he made a remarkable *nature morte* of them. I do not know why I felt that there was a story attached to these old relics, and one day I ventured to ask him if he had a reason for keeping with respect what one ordinarily throws in the scrap-basket.

"'My father,' he said, 'was a clergyman and I studied theology in order to follow the vocation that he had chosen for me. As a young clergyman, I left one morning, without warning my family, for Belgium to preach the Gospel in the factories, not as I had been taught it, but as I understood it. Those boots, as you see them, bravely stood the fatigues of that journey! My words recommended wisdom, obedience to the laws of reason, of conscience, as well as to the duties of a free man. It was considered a revolt against the Church. There was a scandal. My father called a family council in order to have me shut up as a lunatic; thanks to my elder brother, this excellent Theodore, I was left alone, but I had of course to leave the Protestant Church.

"'There happened at this time a terrible fire-damp disaster

in a mine. The doctors were saving the wounded who were considered likely to live, then, faced by necessity, leaving to their sufferings those who had to die. One of these was groaning in a corner, his face covered in blood, his skull ripped open by pieces of coal. I would have liked to save him, I, a spiritual doctor: "Useless," cried the doctor of the rescue corps, "that man is lost, unless one could look after him every moment for forty days, and the Company is not nearly rich enough for such a luxury." I was constantly at his bedside for a whole month, dressing his wounds, asking him to live. He recovered. And before leaving Belgium, I had the vision—in front of this man who carried on his forehead a series of scars like the crown of thorns—I had the vision of Christ resurrected.' But Vincent took up his palette again, and worked in silence. Beside him was a new canvas. I began his portrait. I also had the vision of a Jesus preaching goodness and humility.

"I must tell you that I have never had that mental facility that others, without trouble, find at the end of their paintbrush. Those people can leave a train, take their palette and, in no time, produce you a sun effect. When it is dry it goes to the Luxembourg and is signed 'Carolus Duran.' I don't admire the picture but I do admire the man. . . . He so sure, so calm. I so uncertain, so restless. In every country I need a period of incubation, each time, to learn the essence of the plants, of the trees, of the whole countryside finally, so varied and capricious, never anxious to let itself be understood, nor to give itself.

"I remained therefore some weeks before clearly understanding the rough savour of Arles and its surroundings, which did not prevent us working hard, particularly Vincent. Two beings, he and myself, the one a volcano and the other boiling also. But inside in some way a struggle was preparing itself.

"To begin with I found in everything and with everything a disorder that shocked me. His box of colours was scarcely large enough to contain all the squeezed tubes which were never closed, and in spite of all this disorder, this mess,

something rumbled in his canvases; in his words also. Daudet, de Goncourt, and the Bible burned through his Dutch brain. He had forgotten even how to write Dutch, and as one has been able to see from the publication of his letters to his brother he only wrote in French, and that admirably with an infinity of 'in so far as's.'

"In spite of all my efforts to unravel in his disorderly mind a logical reasoning in his critical opinions, I was not able to explain to myself all the contradiction that there was between his painting and his opinions. Thus, for example, he had an unbounded admiration for Meissonnier and a profound hatred for Ingres. Degas made him despair and Cézanne was only a dauber. Thinking of Monticelli made him cry.

"One of the things that annoyed him was to have to allow me great intelligence whereas I had too small a forehead, a sign of imbecility. And among all this a great tenderness or rather a saintly altruism.

"From the first month, I saw our joint finances take on the same aspects of disorder. What was to be done? The situation was delicate, the cash-box being modestly provisioned by his brother employed by Goupil's; on my side in combination with an exchange into pictures. It was necessary to speak, and to risk blundering against his great touchiness. It was therefore only with great precaution and much coaxing, little compatible with my character, that I touched on the question. I must admit, I succeeded much more easily than I had thought. In a box [was put] so much for nocturnal and hygienic promenading, so much for tobacco, so much also for impromptu expenses, including the rent. On top, a piece of paper and a pencil for the honest noting down of what each took out of the cash-box. In another box, the rest of the sum divided into four parts for the expenses of food for each week. Our little restaurant was suppressed, and with the help of a little gas oven I did the cooking while Vincent did the shopping, without going very far from the house. Once, however, Vincent wanted to make a soup, but I don't know how he made his mixtures.

Probably like the colours in his pictures. It remains that we could not eat it. At which Vincent laughed, saying: 'Tarascon! The cap of *père* Daudet.' On the wall he wrote in chalk:

Je suis Saint-Esprit.
Je suis sain d'esprit.

How long did we remain together? I could not say, having totally forgotten. In spite of the rapidity with which the catastrophe happened; in spite of the fever for working that had got hold of me, all this time appears to me as a century. In spite of what the public may think two men did tremendous work there, useful to both of them; possibly to others. Certain things bear fruit.

"Vincent, at the time of my arrival at Arles, was up to the ears in the post-Impressionist School, and he was making a nice mess of it, which made him suffer; not that this school, like all schools, was bad, but because it did not correspond with his nature, so little patient and so independent. With all his yellows on violets, all this work with complementary colours, a disorderly work on his part, he only arrived at soft, incomplete and monotonous harmonies; the sound of the bugle was lacking. I undertook the task of explaining things to him which was easy for me, for I found rich and fruitful ground. Like all original natures marked with the seal of personality, Vincent had no fear of his neighbour and no obstinacy. From that day my friend, Van Gogh, made astonishing progress; he seemed to catch a glimpse of everything that he had in him, and hence all that series of sunflowers on sunflowers in the brilliant sunshine. . . .

"It would be idle here to enter into details of technique. This has been related in order to tell you that Van Gogh, without losing an inch of his originality, found in me a fruitful precept. And every day he was grateful to me for it. And this is what he meant when he wrote to Monsieur Aurier that he owed much to Paul Gauguin. When I arrived at Arles Vincent was trying to find himself, whilst I, much older, was



a completed man. I am indebted to Vincent for something, which is, with the knowledge of having been useful to him, the strengthening of my previous pictural ideas: then in very difficult moments remembering that there are some more unfortunate than oneself. When I read this statement—*Gauguin's drawing recalls a little that of Van Gogh*—I smile.

"During the latter part of my stay, Vincent became excessively brusque and noisy, then silent. On some evenings I surprised Vincent, who had got up in the act of coming over to my bed. To what should I attribute my waking up at those moments? At all events it was sufficient to say to him very seriously: 'What is wrong with you, Vincent?' for him to get back to bed without saying a word, and sleep solidly. I had the idea of doing his portrait while he was painting the *nature morte* that he was so fond of with the sunflowers. And when the portrait was finished he said to me: 'It is certainly I, but I gone mad.'

"The same evening we went to the café. He ordered a weak absinthe. Suddenly he threw the glass and its contents at my head. I avoided it, and taking him under the arm I left the café, crossed the Place Victor Hugo[1], and a few minutes later Vincent found himself in his bed where in a few seconds he went to sleep and did not wake again until the morning. When he woke, very calm, he said to me: 'My dear Gauguin, I have a vague remembrance that I offended you last evening.' 'I forgive you willingly and delightedly, but yesterday's scene might happen again, and if I were hit I might not remain master of myself, and strangle you. Allow me, therefore, to write to your brother to announce my return.' What a day! Good God!

"When the evening came, I swallowed my dinner and felt the need of going alone to take some air where the laurels were in flower. I had already almost entirely crossed the Place Victor Hugo when I heard behind me a well-known little step, rapid and jerky. I turned round at the very moment when

[1] *Presumably the Place Lamartine.*

Vincent was on the point of throwing himself on me with an open razor in his hand. My look must have been very powerful at that moment for he stopped and lowering his head he returned running to the house.

"Was I cowardly at that moment and ought I not to have disarmed him and tried to pacify him? Often I have questioned my conscience and I have made myself no reproaches. He who likes may cast his stone at me. In a very short time I was at a good hotel in Arles where, after having asked the time, I took a room and went to bed. Being very upset I could only get to sleep towards three in the morning and I woke up rather late, about seven-thirty.

"Arriving at the square I saw a large crowd assembled. Near our house some *gendarmes* and a little man in a bowler hat who was the police commissioner. This is what had taken place.

"Van Gogh went back to the house and immediately cut off an ear close to the head. He must have taken a certain time to stop the force of the bleeding, for the next day numerous damp towels were spread out on the flagstones of the two ground-floor rooms. The blood had dirtied the two rooms and the little staircase that led up to our bedroom.

"When he was in a condition to go out, his head enveloped in a completely pulled down *béret basque* he went straight to a house where, lacking a sweetheart, one makes an acquaintance, and gave the person in charge his ear, well cleaned and enclosed in an envelope. 'Here,' he said, 'in remembrance of me,' then he ran out and went home where he went to bed and to sleep. He took the precaution, however, of closing the shutters and of putting a lighted lamp on a table near the window.

"Ten minutes later the whole street reserved to the women was in movement and the happening was being discussed.

"I was far from knowing anything of all that when I presented myself on the doorstep of our house, and when the man with the bowler hat said to me point-blank in a more severe tone: 'What have you done, sir, to your friend?'

"'I don't know. . . .'

"'Of course . . . you know very well . . . he is dead.'

"I wish no one such a moment, and several long minutes were necessary before I was capable of thinking and restraining the beating of my heart.

"Anger, indignation, pain also and shame before all the glances that were tearing my whole body were suffocating me and I could only stutter: 'Very well, sir, let us go upstairs and we shall discuss that there.' Vincent was lying in the bed completely covered with the sheets, crouching like a retriever: he seemed dead. Softly, very softly, I touched the body whose warmth certainly assured life. It was for me the resumption of all my senses and my energy.

"Almost in a whisper I said to the police commissioner: 'Kindly, sir, wake this man with great tact, and if he asks for me tell him that I have left for Paris: the sight of me might perhaps be fatal to him.' I must admit that from that moment the police commissioner was as pleasant as possible, and he sent, intelligently, for a doctor and a carriage.

"Once he was awake, Vincent asked for his friend, his pipe and his tobacco, even thought of asking for the box that was downstairs and that contained our money—a suspicion, no doubt, that glanced off me for I was already armed against all suffering.

"Vincent was taken to the hospital where, as soon as he had arrived, his brain began again to become unbalanced.

"All the rest is known in those circles where that is of interest and it is useless to speak of it, unless it be of the extreme suffering of a man who, looked after in an asylum, found himself at monthly intervals sufficiently in possession of his senses to understand his condition and to paint with passion the admirable pictures that one knows.

"The last letter that I had was dated from Auvers, near Pontoise. He told me that he had hoped to be sufficiently cured to come to look me up in Brittany, but that now he was obliged to recognise the impossibility of a cure:

"'Dear Master (the only time that he used this word), it is better, after having known you and given you trouble, to die in a good state of mind than in a state that is degrading.'

"He shot himself in the stomach, and it was a few hours afterwards only, lying in his bed and smoking his pipe, that he died, having complete lucidity of mind, with love for his art and without hatred for anyone.

"In *Les Monstres* Jean Dolent wrote:

'"When Gauguin says "Vincent," his voice is soft.' He did not know it, but he guessed it. Jean Dolent is right. We know why."[1]

Gauguin, as soon as the investigations with the police were finished, telegraphed to Theo Van Gogh in Paris to tell him of the disaster. Theo arrived by the first train on Christmas Eve. Gauguin did not see Vincent again but waited in Arles for Theo to arrange for his brother to be looked after. Vincent was left in the charge of a young doctor and Theo and Gauguin travelled back together to Paris a few days after Christmas.

There is a letter from Van Gogh to Gauguin after the latter left Arles. It is undated, but from its contents it must have been written within a few days of Gauguin's departure and is in reply to one from him to Vincent.

"MY DEAR FRIEND GAUGUIN,—Thank you for your letter. Remaining alone in my little yellow house, as indeed it was perhaps my duty to be the last to remain, I am not without feeling bored at the departure of friends.

". . . Now I have remorse at having perhaps—I who insisted so much that you should remain here and await events, and who gave you so many good reasons for that—now I have remorse at having perhaps determined your departure—unless this departure had been resolved on before? And that therefore it is perhaps for me to show that I had the right frankly to be informed.

"However it may be, we like each other enough, I hope,

[1] *Avant et Après* and *Diverse Choses.*

to be able still in case of need to begin again if, being broke—alas, always possible for us other artists who have no capital—such a move were necessary.

". . . Ah! my dear friend, to do with painting what already before our time the music of Berlioz and of Wagner has done . . . a consoling art for broken hearts! There are still only a few who, like you and I, understand it.

"My brother understands you well, and when he says that you are unfortunate like me, then that does prove that he understands us. I will send you your things, but, at moments, I still feel weak, and then I cannot even make the gesture necessary to send you your things. In a few days I shall make bold to do so. And the fencing masks and gloves (only use as seldom as possible less childish weapons of war), these terrible weapons will wait until then. I am writing to you now very calmly, but the packing up of everything else I have not been able to do.

"During my brain fever or madness, I do not know exactly how to call it, my thoughts steered over a great many oceans. I even dreamed of the Dutch phantom ship and voyaged as far as the Horla and it seems that there I sang, I who do not know how to sing on other occasions, an old nurse's song, while thinking of what the woman sang who rocked the sailors and whom I looked for in her succession of colours before falling ill. [The silhouette of a fish follows, on which is written ICTUS.]

"Not knowing the music of Berlioz. *Poignée de main bien de coeur.*

Tout à vous VINCENT.

"I should be very pleased if you would write to me again soon. Have you already read *Tartarin* fully, yet? The imagination of the Midi makes chums, now, and between us we shall always have friendship."

Vincent was as devoted to Gauguin as he had ever been, but it is evident that his brain was still very clouded and

that he did not realise the reason for Gauguin's departure. He, at least, blames Gauguin for nothing and seems to think only of a moment in the future when they could be together again. No man—unless he were an extreme type of masochist, and this Van Gogh most certainly was not—would wish to continue to live with someone to whose taunting he believed that his madness was due.

Gauguin was guilty of having a strong character, of having definite ideas that he could impart to others, of suffering fools and imbeciles ungladly and of having been fortunate enough to save his own life. He cannot be accused from the tenor of his reminiscences of that time, nor from the evidence of Vincent's attitude towards him after he had left Arles, to have possessed while he was there the instincts of the devil, to have jeered unmercifully at his friend, as has been alleged, nor finally to have goaded him to madness. The severest criticism that may be levelled at him is that possibly he did not try to "teach" Vincent the things that he wished to learn with the patience that would normally be given to a beginner; but Vincent was no beginner nor was Gauguin temperamentally a patient teacher. He reserved his patience for dealing with the unending adverse events that came into his own life, for dealing with Mette's epistolary outbursts and for keeping the thought of their ultimate reunion before him.

Van Gogh and Gauguin continued to exchange letters, but desultorily, until Van Gogh's death. Vincent had benefited from Gauguin's visit to him to the extent that he had learned something technically, and he incorporated this new knowledge in the work which he did during the moments of feverish intermittent painting of the following and last eighteen months of his life.

He was allowed for a time to live on in the Yellow House, but later it was considered advisable for him to enter a state asylum near Arles. After a year he was placed by Theo under the supervision of a country doctor named Gachet who lived at Auvers near Paris. This Dr. Gachet was himself

a painter who collected the work of the Impressionists, most of whom were his friends. But Vincent's periodical insanity continued until July 1890 when he committed suicide. Theo, whose health was imperfect, was deeply affected by Vincent's death, and he survived his brother for six months only. Charles Laval also died in 1890. Gauguin thus lost three friends in comparatively quick succession, but it cannot seriously be upheld that he was in any way responsible for the death of any of them.

Chapter Twelve

LE POULDU

Gauguin's precipitous return to Paris from his two months as Vincent's guest in Arles was probably the best thing under the circumstances that he could have done. Vincent had shown homicidal instincts and Gauguin was afraid that a further sight of him might rouse Vincent to attempt the same thing again, while even were that not to happen, Vincent's behaviour in the café, if repeated, might make him retaliate in a way that he would regret.

Gauguin and Vincent did not meet again, for, with the exception of a very short stay in Paris on his arrival from Arles, Gauguin spent the following months, until the winter of 1890, in Brittany. When he did return to Paris, Vincent had been dead for several months.

The World Fair and International Exhibition in Paris opened in 1889. The *pestiférés* did not succeed, as was to be expected, in gaining admittance to the official exhibition of orthodox painters in the Palace of Fine Arts. But a subterfuge had the extraordinary effect of permitting a mostly hostile public to see about a hundred of their canvases on exhibition in the building. On the ground floor various refreshment stands had been let to concessionaires, and in one of them, that a certain Monsieur Volpini had taken, the *pestiférés* arranged to exhibit their paintings. A white oblong catalogue striped with blue informed the patrons of the refreshment stand that the exhibition of paintings was that of the Impressionist and Synthetic Group. In spite of Gauguin's movement away from Impressionism, the name was retained in the title of the exhibition in order, most probably, to attract the attention of the public. Eight names beside that of Gauguin were represented, among which, however, Emile Bernard figured twice, for certain of his work that he had entitled "*peintures*

pétroles" were exhibited under the pseudonym of Ludovic Nemo.

Of the rest, Charles Laval exhibited some Martinique canvases, while Louis Anquetin, Georges Daniel [de Monfreid], Léon Fauché, Louis Roy and Emile Schuffenecker completed the band. There was also on view an album of lithographs by Gauguin and Emile Bernard. De Rotonchamp has recorded that "through the clouds of steam that escaped from a monumental kettle, among the *va-et-vient* of busy waiters, seventeen canvases by Gauguin could be seen, dating from Martinique, Brittany and Arles. . . . Two facsimiles of drawings by Gauguin decorated the pages of the catalogue: two tragic bathing women, one seated, head in hands, the other battling sadly against the waves; and two Breton women haymakers with brutish profiles . . . And the scared visitors, attracted by the rhythmic snoring of a chamber orchestra that was dominated by the strident bow of 'Princess Dolgorouka' [presumably the first violin], contemplated these singular compositions, to which the most ill-wishing were unable to deny, apart from academic faults, the merit of originality and audacity."

Gauguin, however, did not wait long in Paris after the opening of the Exhibition at Volpini's refreshment stand, but went back to Pont-Aven. For a time he was the only *pestiféré* at Madame Gloanec's *pension*, eating alone except for the company of a rather nebulous lay visitor who went by the name of Père Lapuce and about whom nothing else is known. In the summer, however, he was joined by Paul Sérusier, the new convert to his theories.

About this time Gauguin painted a portrait of a certain Madame Satre, a friend of some of the painters at the Pension Gloanec and a lady who, at a later date, became Mayoress of Pont-Aven. Known as "La Belle Angèle," it was bought, after having been refused by Madame Satre when Gauguin wished to give it to her, by the painter Degas when Gauguin sold all his available canvases two years later to finance his first visit to the South Seas.

Madame Satre lived to regret her act and to record the bourgeois disapproval that it provoked at the time. "Gauguin was very gentle and very poor and we liked him. Only, at that time, his painting frightened people a little. He was always telling my husband that he wanted to do my portrait, so much so that one day he began it. But while he worked he would never allow me to look at the canvas because he said one cannot judge anything while the picture is being painted, and always he covered it up after each sitting. When he had finished, he showed it first to other painters, who made good fun of it, and I knew that; so that when he brought it to me, I was already prejudiced. And my mother had said: 'It seems that some painters fought last evening over your portrait. That's a pretty story about you!' Gauguin himself was very pleased with it and walked about the house, looking for the best place to hang it. But when he showed it to me, I said to him: 'What a horror!' and that he could well take it away, for I would never want anything like that in my house. Imagine! at that time, and in a little place like this! Especially as I scarcely knew anything about painting then! Gauguin was very upset and disappointed and said that he had never realised a portrait as well as that one. After that, obviously, there was a coolness between us and I scarcely saw him. I have since heard that at the Degas sale my portrait that I had refused to have as a present was sold for several tens of thousands of francs." She had accepted a seascape by Moret, one of the *pestiférés* of the year before, but that unfortunately proved to have but little value. "Yes," she is further reported to have said, "but it was a seascape, whilst a portrait . . ." Madame Satre's portrait now hangs in the Louvre.

Gauguin was equally unsuccessful in giving away another of his more famous pictures, "Jacob Wrestling with the Angel," which, together with his "Yellow Christ" and several other pictures with religious subjects, were painted at Pont-Aven during this visit and which have been declared to have been prompted by an underlying mysticism in his character. It is difficult to





LA BELLE ANGÈLE

believe that these paintings were inspired by any genuine religious belief, for at no time in his life had Gauguin been a practising Christian, while he showed during the last ten or more years of his life a definite anti-clericalism. An association between the calm backwardness of much of Brittany and the simple and genuine beliefs of the peasants appealed to his dramatic sense and provoked in him a respect for the touching piousness that he saw before him, and gave him the desire to record and to do homage to it. This feeling also prompted him to offer a picture to one of the country churches. His lack of success in giving this picture away was however from a financial point of view fortunate for it brought him nine hundred francs in the sale of his paintings that he organised before leaving Europe. Later, in Oceania, he frequently heard of the purchase by other people of paintings or sculpture that he had succeeded in giving away and was forced to reflect on the unwisdom of such giving, particularly when those sales took place at a time when he himself still succeeded in selling next to nothing. "Beware of presents, they are not worth while," he wrote in one of his letters at that time, and the two *curés* to whom he offered "Jacob Wrestling with the Angel" seemed already to have come to that conclusion. The first to refuse was the *curé* at Pont-Aven. Gauguin had hoped that he would place the picture in his church, but without doubt he belonged to those who were, as Madame Satre had said, a little frightened of his painting. Sérusier and Gauguin thereupon took the painting, a large canvas, across the river and offered it to the *curé* at Nizon, a town on an eminence opposite Pont-Aven. But the news of the first refusal had reached the second *curé* and the two men were obliged to take back the picture with them to the Pension Gloanec and to give up the idea of giving it away.

Pont-Aven was beginning to attract tourists as well as artists, and the countryside, typified by its ducks and geese and the starched head-dresses of the women, was becoming noisy and exploited. Sérusier and Gauguin determined to go elsewhere to escape the new crowds and to be able to work

more peacefully—and, probably, to be able to live more cheaply. They chose a small fishing village facing the open sea named Le Pouldu, moving there at the end of September. Paul Sérusier has recorded his recollection of this move. "To transport his small amount of luggage from Pont-Aven to Le Pouldu, we embarked in the customs boat, thanks to the kindness of Monsieur Jacob, the chief customs officer. Captain Jacob! I can still remember the very red face that Gauguin gave him when he painted his portrait in bathing slips."

Gauguin remained for more than twelve months at Le Pouldu, gathering round him several friends who are said to have composed the Pont-Aven School of Painting. This, besides being a misnomer, is making a mountain out of a mole-hill. The men who were there were bound together by a general agreement on theories, the theories that Gauguin propounded and that had made him renounce the strictly Impressionist group. He did nothing more than propound his theories; he did not teach; the others copied him or were influenced by him.

In spite of Sérusier's description of the boat journey there is some doubt as to whether he himself actually moved with Gauguin to Le Pouldu or whether Gauguin's companion at the beginning was a certain Dutchman named Meyer de Haan. In any event, de Haan was in Le Pouldu soon after Gauguin's arrival there, and Sérusier, if he went with him for a time, returned to Paris, from where he reappeared at Le Pouldu in the spring.

For a short time Gauguin stayed at the Destais inn at the cross-roads from Quimperlé and Pont-Aven, but at the beginning of October he moved to another, probably in the company of de Haan, kept by a Mademoiselle Marie Henry. Here he stayed until November of the next year, 1890. Mademoiselle Henry's establishment, known as the Hôtel de la Plage, was a kilometre from the main roads and was near the sea, surrounded by fields. The only building near was an uninhabited villa. Here, at last, Gauguin found the quiet that was so necessary to him and for his work.

Meyer de Haan, who is important at this period on account of the fact that he took pity on Gauguin's impecuniosity and supported him entirely during the greater part of a year, if not for even longer, had founded a biscuit factory in Amsterdam. This concern is reputed to have been very prosperous, but having decided to become a painter he made it over to his brothers for a pension of £12 a month. Later, after having studied in traditional academics, he had been greatly struck by an exhibition of Impressionist painting and had travelled to London to seek the advice of Camille Pissarro. Pissarro gave him an introduction to Gauguin, and it was in this way that he found his way to Brittany. He has been described as "a small being, rachitic, ill-made, poorly, almost an invalid," and as "deformed, reddish, with a sly eye." But he was generous and undoubtedly had other resources than the monthly pension from the biscuit factory. The story, however, that one of his academic paintings was at one time considered by the "Amsterdam Museum" at the price of 100,000 francs, is probably French provincial hearsay.

Gauguin and de Haan rented during the winter the garret of the near-by Villa de Mauduit and made use of it as a studio, but in the spring they moved to a wooden shed attached to Mademoiselle Henry's inn that had formerly been used as a stable. This was cleaned out, a wooden floor was laid and the north wall glazed. Monsieur Mothéré, who later married the hostess of the Hôtel de la Plage, has stated, poetically and proudly, that this "became the convenient shelter where they were able to give themselves over to their ardour for work without any fear of interruption or of annoyance. The artistic *thébaide* dreamed of by Gauguin was then for the first time realised. Le Pouldu was the first of his 'Tahitis'; his French 'Tahiti.'"

That Le Pouldu and the installation that Gauguin achieved there were of a kind that suited him is evident from the length of time that he remained there, and afterwards from his frequent and warm references to the place in his conversation.

Monsieur Mothéré's pride may be excused, but if any place were to demand the title of Gauguin's "first Tahiti" it is not possible to pass over the claims of the negroes' hut in the sugarfields at the foot of Mont Pelée in Martinique, where, at least, climatic conditions were nearer to Oceania than those of a Brittany winter.

Panama and Martinique had been Gauguin's first escape from the social atmosphere engendered by his *bête noire,* the European *imbécile.* Le Pouldu was an escape also, but an escape only from the vanguard of the *imbéciles* so near at hand in Pont-Aven. It was a successful move, and Meyer de Haan's generosity in insisting that Gauguin should make *bourse commune* with him undoubtedly allowed the arrangement to last as long as it did.

Monsieur Mothéré has given the following description of Gauguin at Le Pouldu: "He was forty-two years old. He was tall, his face browned, his hair black and rather long, his nose aquiline, large green eyes, with a small horseshoe-shaped beard and a short moustache. He presented a grave and imposing appearance, a calm and reflective manner that at times became ironic in the presence of Philistines, and a great muscular strength, of which he did not like to make use. His slow walk, quiet movements, and his severe look gave him much natural dignity and held newcomers and strangers at a distance. Under this cold and impenetrable mask were hidden his keen senses and a sensualist's temperament always in search of new sensations. Never having finished his studies, the Latins and the Greeks had remained incomprehensible to him, and he despised them for want of having studied them. From his travels as a sailor, he had brought back some precepts of a rudimentary pragmatism that he summed up in a formula more than once inscribed on his work or on familiar objects that he liked to decorate: 'Long live wine, love and tobacco!' 'Wine' to him fortunately limited itself to occasional small glasses of cognac, in which he did not over-indulge and which he ordered more for appearances than from preference. But 'love and tobacco' had a strong hold of his heart." De Haan provided the tobacco

as well as everything else. A pound packet was from time to time placed in an earthenware vase kept for the purpose, from which Gauguin helped himself. When the tobacco was finished, Gauguin showed the tragic state of affairs by becoming "sad, silent and gloomy," for he would never ask directly for more to be provided. The cause of this moroseness, however, was as a rule soon discovered, and under the influence of a further supply "the features of the great man took on their accustomed serenity. As for 'love,' it was his great passion, the one that dominated him all his life, and which, at first enclosed and repressed, became from day to day more despotic and ardent. . . . During the time at Le Pouldu, he submitted it again to a comparatively strict discipline. But he regretted freely not having practised in his youth the free life of the Quartier Latin; and, perhaps to atone for this omission, he already dreamed of emigrating to Tahiti, where he had planned to take with him de Haan and Monsieur Emile Bernard."

We have Monsieur Mothéré's evidence of Gauguin's comparative abstemiousness, which is in contrast with the accusations in his "legend" that he was a drunkard and an absinthe addict. If, during the sufferings of his last years in Oceania, he drank more than he had in Europe—and this accusation is coupled with so many obvious inaccuracies as to be itself suspect—it cannot be wondered at, for he was doing nothing that the tropical conditions did not demand.

Monsieur Mothéré in his account, now gives way to generalisations that are less valuable, if not less interesting. "Therefore, in his case, great avidity for sensations. In contrast, penury of sentiments. The base of his character was a ferocious egotism, the egotism of the genius who considers the whole world as a prey dedicated to the glorification of his power, like the raw material of his personal creations. No charity, no pity, no tenderness, no altruism." As the greater part of Monsieur Mothéré's information was based on his wife's reminiscences and on talks with some of Gauguin's friends, his conclusions are not those of a man who knew Gauguin intimately (if at all).

They tally a little with the Gauguin of the letters to his wife and to de Monfreid, but they tally more with the Gauguin of hearsay, the legendary heartless wife-forsaker, taunting and sadistic towards his friends.

Paul Sérusier, whose evidence must be given precedence, has recorded a different impression of Gauguin's altruisms and an explanation of his alleged brutal behaviour.

"Gauguin was very tolerant; we often slept in the same room and often I kept the candle lighted to read in bed, long after Gauguin had decided to go to sleep; but he never made the least sign of impatience. I must, however, admit that he took great pleasure in frightening Séguin who was very timid by nature; when Séguin, for example, placed complementary colours next each other, Gauguin, who disapproved of the procedure, calmly took out his revolver from his pocket, loaded it and put it on the table . . . and Séguin never put complementary colours together again."

It is often difficult for a poor man, unless he be a saint, to be anything other than an egotist. The poorer or the hungrier he becomes, so his thoughts inevitably centre themselves on his own condition and he can think of nothing but the alleviation of his worries and the defence against their recurrence once his position may have become easier. Gauguin's "ferocious egotism," if that be a just description of his efforts to help himself, was prompted by exactly this. It was dictated and developed by the necessity for painting and, once he had made the supreme first gesture by quitting Bertin's, every other event in his life was obliged to be dependent on the necessity that had dictated this. But it did not suddenly deprive him of his love for his family or of his natural and profound patience with himself.

Gauguin and de Haan seem to have led a very regular life while at Mademoiselle Henry's inn Le Pouldu. "They got up very early in the morning and came down from their rooms about seven. Having breakfasted on *café-au-lait*, bread, and butter, they went out to work in the open country. They came

back at eleven-thirty for luncheon at midday. Towards one-thirty or two, they began work again until five, unless they had to receive visitors, which was exceptional. Dinner was at seven. The interval between their return from their work and the meal was occupied in talking or visiting the studio. They went to bed early towards nine, but not before they had played their game of loto or of draughts. . . . Often also they drew by lamplight. They read nothing, neither books nor papers. . . . But music was a favourite pastime with them. Meyer de Haan liked listening, without, however, ever playing, although he said that he could. Gauguin played the mandoline and the piano. He had learned this latter instrument, on which he could only just play pieces with a slow rhythm, very late, when he was grown up. The 'agility' of experienced pianists was lacking in him. His repertoire included notably Schumann, *la Berceuse* and *la Rêverie*, and Handel. Once some musicians, strangers to the house, came to play the violin. They worked little in their studio, being almost always out of doors, except, of course, when it was a question of sculpture."

It is possible, although unlikely, that his knowledge of piano playing dated only from this summer, for there is a record of an expedition that he undertook with Paul Sérusier to the town of Lorient, some thirty kilometres away. He had sold a picture and the pair travelled by carriage. In Lorient, Gauguin saw a piano in a shop and hired it. To Sérusier's surprised query as to whether he knew how to play, Gauguin replied: "Oh, no, but with a little intuition . . .!"

Monsieur Mothéré adds an interesting if somewhat poetical account of the method of landscape painting that Gauguin practised at this period. "Their method consisted of visiting thoroughly the places that they wished to paint and of studying to repletion the lines, harmonies, lighting and the tones on which they took abundant notes, pencil in hand. Gauguin liked to repeat that the work ought to be completely finished in the mind of the painter before he began his canvas. When this thorough and patient preparation was finished, when they

knew, so to say, by heart in advance the projected picture, they lay in wait for the light. At last the precious morning would come that gave the so deeply thought-out and desired effect. Then the artist would seize his brushes and, face to face with nature, would take in one sitting the poem of his dream. He began by tracing the composition with strokes of prussian blue, broad, definite, decisive, precise, expressive and so to say nuanced by filled and empty areas. Then, in these rigorously defined spaces, he applied the colours by vertical or oblique touches, scarcely covering the canvas, placed with a velvety supple and feline movement. 'One would have said a cat playing with a mouse.' The whole, at one go, without touchings up or new starts. 'In one séance,' he often recommended, 'otherwise it is a failure, for it is better to begin a new canvas than to retouch.' "

Gauguin had no patience with the methods practised by the academic painters whom he had now been able to escape in Pont-Aven, who dutifully covered an entirely white canvas from a starting-point in one of the corners and who spent all their working hours indoors. Characterising them as "Americans" he was happy to have succeeded in escaping them and their lifeless works at last. The perfection of a process of colour-photography would prove to them, he hoped, that the Impressionsists and their derivatives were in fact nearer to nature than they, who had the production of what amounted in their eyes to a coloured photograph as their ideal.

The country round Le Pouldu changed startlingly with every alteration in the light. The trees were most frequently oaks, solid and dark and full of deft shapes, while the stone walls that were typical of the region broke up the fields into angular ever-varying areas of colour. De Rotonchamp reasonably sees in this the origin of the group's theory of synthetism, owing to the natural *cloisonnés* that the countryside itself offered.

Gauguin and de Haan did not often pay models to sit for them but made exceptions in favour of Capitaine, an old beggar of picturesque appearance, and of a young girl of the

neighbourhood, but even the girl's services were hired only once. "In reality their real models were all the country people. . . . With quick and curious strokes they recorded in their notebooks the gestures, attitudes, groupings and poses of animals and men. All of this work was included later in their system of previous elaboration, without which they did not allow any production and upon which they drew."

At some date during the first half of the year, Gauguin received a letter from Van Gogh in which he expressed a desire to come to Le Pouldu to join him. Gauguin, who now referred to Vincent as his "assassin," lost no time in replying that the inn was full. The cordiality of their relationship on paper remained, and Vincent still found time to write to him in the same affectionate manner as before. In July the correspondence ceased owing to Van Gogh's death. Emile Bernard, who had been staying at Pont-Aven during the spring and early summer and who had exchanged frequent and sometimes humorous letters with Gauguin on the subject of their projected trip to Tahiti, was in Paris at the time and went to Vincent's funeral at Auvers. It has not been recorded whether Gauguin contemplated attending Vincent's funeral also. It is improbable in any case that it could have been practicable financially, for at the beginning of the summer he had already been once to Paris on a short visit. On his return, he surprised the countryside by appearing in a large Buffalo Bill hat and bright yellow pointed shoes, forerunners of the extraordinary clothes that he wore three or four years later during his last visit to Europe.

Throughout the spring and early summer more and more visitors came to see Gauguin and stay at Mademoiselle Henry's inn for long and short periods. Charles Laval and a friend were among the first. It is probable that this was the last time that Gauguin and he met. Sérusier was the next to come, staying until the late autumn. Many of these visitors, however, came over from Pont-Aven and, to return these visits, Gauguin and all those who were staying at Mademoiselle Henry's inn

went for the day to the Pension Gloanec on the 14th of July, the French national holiday. Concerning this expedition no details have unfortunately survived, although it is impossible to imagine that it could have been without incident, particularly as Gauguin had not been in Pont-Aven for ten months and as he had added so spectacularly to his wardrobe.

At the end of July, when another visitor, Charles Filiger, came to Mademoiselle Henry's for a long stay, the inn was very full. Monsieur Mothéré, a little scandalously, tells us that "in the middle of this summer of 1890 the poor little house at Le Pouldu sheltered under its roof: Meyer de Haan in the large room, Gauguin in the courtyard room, Monsieur Sérusier in the room on the street, Monsieur Filiger in the studio, the proprietress in the *cabinet de toilette*, and the maid in the tap-room. Gauguin profited from the fact that the roof of the kitchen, immediately under his window, opened up to him a possible means of getting up at night and fraternising with the maid in the tap-room and passing several happy moments with her. The former squadron-steersman repeated there the programme of his nights-out as a sailor, the climb, the wench and the bottle. 'Long live wine, love and tobacco.'" Gauguin's room at Mademoiselle Henry's inn was decorated with the photographs of several of his favourite paintings, among which were Manet's "Olympia," Botticelli's "Triumph of Venus" and an Annunciation by Fra Angelico. There were also some Japanese prints and "decorations" by Puvis de Chavannes.

Charles Filiger had come to Brittany to live economically after an unpleasant misadventure in Paris, where he had been attacked and left unconscious with a knife wound in his thigh and in the hand. He had been a student at the Colarossi studio.

Among those who now formed Gauguin's fluctuating group of friends and unsolicited followers were, apart from de Haan, Bernard, Sérusier and Filiger, several others who came for long or short visits to Le Pouldu. Armand Séguin, Henri Moret, Maurice Maufra and Paul-Emile Colin were other more

intimate or permanent members of the group. De Chamaillard, who had been with Gauguin at Pont-Aven two years before, was also living near by, at the mouth of the Aven.

Although Gauguin evolved, inevitably, theories and maxims of his own, he was intolerant of slavish adherence to a set of theories and he discarded his own as soon as they were proved to him to be unsatisfactory or no longer current. The theories of all groups and schools he characterised impatiently as *foutaises*. He declared that he had warned Van Gogh against all systems and theories. The theory of *synthèse*, which had been elaborated two years before at Pont-Aven, and which had formed part of the label of the Volpini Exhibition, soon fell from grace. That he observed it ironically by the time he left France for Tahiti is proved by the existence of a piece of pottery on which he had written phonetically: "Vive la Sintaize," mocking in this way at its erection into a creed.

Gauguin at this time made a belated excursion into the realm of pointillism, painting in this technique a still life that he named *Le Ripipoint*. An inhabitant of Le Pouldu of the name of David is reported to have written a poem to this canvas, while Mademoiselle Henry had the intelligence to accept it as a present.

Mademoiselle Henry was undoubtedly more broad-minded and long-suffering than most of the inn-keepers of her day. When Gauguin and his friends had been allowed to make themselves at home, the little sitting-room of the hotel, that also served as the dining-room, presented a remarkable appearance. The glass panes of the window, that looked on to the street and that the storms of the ensuing years gradually destroyed, had been decorated with a continuous design in washes of coloured turpentine inspired by the life of the Breton countryside. The ceiling had been entirely covered by Gauguin with a fresco in which the familiar words "Honi soit qui mal y pense" surrounded, so it was naïvely declared by some, a double-headed goose that was searching for fleas in a woman's head. This was, in fact, not the case. The bird was a

swan, Gauguin's emblem for himself. The woman was his favourite of the moment, and the head bore her features. Who she was is uncertain, unless she were a model of the name of Juliette to whom, and to the child she bore him, a few short and regretful references appear in his letters after his arrival in Tahiti. The walls were almost entirely covered with paintings, lithographs, and drawings by Gauguin and his friends, and where there was space on the plaster various exhortations and mottoes had been painted. Encircling a still-life that contained some onions had been inscribed the statement: "I like onions fried in oil." On the base of the wall beneath the window a phrase, reputed to be by Wagner, had been painted in grey, declaring that any form of art executed for money was without value.

Meyer de Haan had painted a large portrait of Mademoiselle Henry. This picture had greatly impressed Gauguin—diplomatically it is possible—and after having made a painted frame for it, he had placed it in the most prominent place in the room, in the middle of the wall facing the door. On this same wall were two landscapes by Gauguin, one containing a portrait of his dog, as well as some lithographs on yellow paper and sketches on board.

On the mantelpiece in the wall facing the window was an over life-size bust by Gauguin of Meyer de Haan that had been carved from an oak trunk and painted. Above it was a landscape of a Breton dance, and on both sides stood stoneware pots decorated with humorous designs. On shelves nailed to the wall on either side of the mantelpiece had been placed two statuettes, one a negress in painted plaster, the other a Javanese dancer, inspired by a figure in a frieze that he had obtained from the Javanese pavilion at the Universal Exhibition of the year before. The upper panel of the door had fixed to it the canvas entitled "Bonjour, Monsieur Gauguin," while on the lower panel the portrait of a Carib woman had been painted directly on the wood. A self-portrait and a portrait of Meyer de Haan had been painted on the two panels of the doors of a cupboard in

the room. Finally, above the tap-room door in the entrance to the inn was a canvas, suitably entitled, "The Terrestrial Paradise."

Paul-Emile Colin, one of the small band, has recalled incidents in the lives of some of the inhabitants of the Hôtel de la Plage while he was on a visit during this summer. During his stay there Charles Filiger was there, besides Gauguin and de Haan. Gauguin was occupied with plans for a visit to some new tropical colony of France.

"Gauguin had just published an album of lithographs and he was resting, or seemed to be, but turning over in his mind his voyage. He used to tell us about the charms of the life there and the artistic opportunities. He had now the firm intention of going there for a long time: it was from then on the objective of his life. . . . One day, Filiger, in order to finish the decoration of the living-room, painted the Virgin Mary on a pier-glass in the manner of one of the charming little *gouaches* that he could do. At other times, music occupied us four. Gauguin took his guitar, Filiger his mandoline and we went to the sands to a corner in the rocks; a melody by Schumann rose softly from the mandoline that Filiger played with a great deal of feeling; but it was an almost imperceptible sound; he played for himself . . . he was gentle, but so far from our civilisation, so above it . . . I can also see Gauguin bathing on the beach at Le Pouldu, with his beaked nose, his clear seaman's eyes and his black hair a little long, his beret and bathing slips, with the stomach of a man of forty; he made you think at the same time of a boatman, a troubadour and a pirate. He had the greatest admiration for the character of Vautrin in *La Comédie Humaine*, and one felt that at other times and under other circumstances and without his love of art, he could have been his brother. Energy was given off by his whole body; he seemed to produce an enormous amount of work. He had read a great deal: the Bible, Shakespeare, Balzac, seem to me to have held first place in his admiration. . . . In spite of his energetic temperament, Gauguin was a gentle man . . . he liked to talk, to speak of the things that he admired, and his remarks about nature were

savoury and substantial. From this point of view, all his friends have rightly been able to call themselves his pupils. At this period of his life when I knew him, he was in a precarious situation. . . . There are two men for whose character I have a profound admiration, for they sacrificed everything to Art with the half-certainty that they would never profit from their efforts: Gauguin and the publisher Edouard Pelletan. . . ."

Gauguin's ability to *make* things with his hands was one of his most remarkable characteristics. It was the product of the intuitive sense that enabled him to understand at once and master the technical side of the various activities that interested him besides painting: sculpture, pottery-making and glazing, lithography and etching, although this last medium does not seem to have appealed to him, for he made but one experiment, a portrait of his friend Stéphane Mallarmé that he executed in Paris in the early part of 1891. This ability, extended to an immediate comprehension of mechanical things, gave him the knowledge of how musical instruments should be played.

Emile Schuffenecker has recorded that he never saw Gauguin abandon a canvas—this in marked contrast to Monsieur Mothéré's statement and to the methods of his contemporary, Paul Cézanne—nor a piece of sculpture, nor a piece of pottery. "Every material," in his hand he said, "transformed itself into a work of art. I have seen him make jewels with iron stove-piping, and all that without apparent trouble or hesitation." Even at the end of a long day's painting Gauguin frequently spent some time carving peasant sabots or the handle of a walking-stick. The sabots of light coloured wood that he made for himself with openwork carving and vermilion, bright blue, and gold decorations were to become famous during the following winter when he wore them in Paris, and later during the prosperous months when he lived in the rue Vercingétorix after his first visit to Tahiti. His chief regret during this time at Le Pouldu was that there was no oven where he could have fired pottery.

The references that have been made to Gauguin's determination during this year to leave France for some tropical island raises the uncertain point as to when he first considered such a plan. When he had left France for 'America' in 1887 it was not with the intention of finding an exotic retreat in a tropical climate, but in order to try anything that would relieve him of his financial difficulties and allow him to have "a clear conscience" over his debts. The fortuitous calling of his ship at Martinique on the way out gave him a momentary glimpse of a tropical island and the set intention of returning there if he were able.

His visit to Martinique changed his direction in painting by enlarging his palette peremptorily and thereby freeing him from true Impressionism. It had also given him a suspicion of the pleasures that might be experienced among "savages" in a less fearful climate, and there is no doubt that, since his return, he had been anxious to find and to go to such a place, where there was perpetual sun, and colour of which he could never tire, and where the inhabitants were of a greater physical beauty of body and movement, owing to the absence of unnecessary clothing, than the convention-bound European or American *imbécile*. To Gauguin the epithet, "savage," that appears frequently in his conversation and letters at this time, was a name of respect which he used for races that were not yet fully encumbered with Western civilisation.

But the chief cause of his dissatisfaction, after the growing impatience that he felt with the continued ascendancy of the influence in all artistic matters of *imbécile* bourgeois society, was that, having once seen colour in tropical sunlight, his experiments at rendering the thinner light of Europe could no longer satisfy him. It is possible also that some vague atavism had been aroused in him by his contact with coloured people, and it must not be forgotten that he had spent four years as a very impressionable child in the semi-sumptuous surroundings of mid-nineteenth-century Peru.

His first choice was Madagascar, the large French island in

the Indian Ocean off the east coast of Africa. De Haan, who was not robust, would not agree however as the climate was known to be bad or, at worst, extremely enervating. Another place had therefore to be found.

At some period, possibly at the Universal Exhibition, a pamphlet describing Tahiti came into Gauguin's hands. He had already refused one offer of work in Oceania on the grounds of its inaccessibility and that acceptance would have meant abandoning all hope of being reunited one day with his family. Mothéré's suggestion that he now thought of Oceania favourably owing to the reported freedom of the Polynesians' morals may have been an underlying factor, for it cannot be denied that Gauguin had developed into a great *coureur*, but more sensible and mundane reasons probably carried most weight. He was searching for a place where he believed the cost of living to be cheap and, apart from this, Tahiti offered the climatic and pictural conditions under which he now wished to paint. A periodical, *Le Journal des Voyages*, also fell into his hands. In it was an account of the scenes and colours of Polynesia and of the unspoiled freedom of the lives of the islanders. The desire to escape to a part of the world where the West had not yet penetrated became uppermost in his mind.

It has been thought that the restlessness, which he had known as a child and as a youth, had been revived by the journey to Panama and Martinique, and that he could bear a comparatively settled life no longer. But Martinique is responsible more for the revelation of colour that he experienced there than for the revival of a long-dormant urge to globe-trot. Writing at this time to the Danish painter, Willemsen, whom he had doubtless met while at Copenhagen, he gives the more mundane and accepted reasons as the true ones. "My mind is made up: I want soon to go to Tahiti, a little island in Oceania, where material life has no need of money. A terrible epoch is being prepared in Europe for the coming generation: the reign of Gold. Everything is rotten, both men and the arts. Here one

is incessantly distracted. There, at least, the Tahitian, under a summer sky and living on a wonderfully fertile soil, needs only to put out his hand to find food. Consequently, he never works. Life, to the Tahitian, consists of singing and making love, so that once my material life is well organised, I shall be able to give myself up entirely to painting, free from all artistic jealousy, and without any necessity for shady dealing."

At the beginning of November, he and de Haan left Mademoiselle Henry's inn for Paris. It had been agreed that they and Emile Bernard should leave for Tahiti as soon as the arrangements could be made.

Chapter Thirteen

CORRESPONDENCE WITH METTE

Gauguin was now in his forty-third year and was ready for the maturer realisation of his art that was before him. De Rotonchamp gives a picture of Gauguin in his early maturity. He "was not talkative and spoke in aphorisms punctuated with silence. Proceeding by statements rather than by reasoning, he did not like to argue. Before a courageous contradiction he would fix on the impudent æsthete a certain *torve* fixed sidelong look, that told, by its wild lights, that the grandson of Chazal was keeping an eye on him. And if, without contradiction, the interlocutor simply persisted when the painter no longer wished to talk, a significant silence came into operation, or Gauguin changed the subject of conversation."

Gauguin had always been willing to talk of his ideas before a small audience whom he knew to be sympathetic to him and at Pont-Aven and later at Le Pouldu the members of his group had provided him with just that atmosphere. He was the eldest among them. Temperamentally, it suited him to have younger men round him, for there was less likelihood of their showing disrespect by uncalled-for arguing. His voice at this period was indistinct and thick, due probably to over-smoking, and his face was beginning to show signs of the worry and disappointments of his life. He was never without a cigarette or, as an occasional change, a common clay pipe. His hair had begun to lose its former brilliance. De Rotonchamp declares that it was originally chestnut verging on red-brown, but that it had now lost colour. Other observers have described his hair as black, but as a sailor his hair was noted as being chestnut-coloured on his official card, and he has given his moustache and hair reddish lights in many of his self-portraits. "Under its long and curly mass lay his broad and slightly retreating forehead. His eyes, under heavy eyelids, were

greenish-grey. His nose was strong and arched. His moustache, thinner and lighter in colour than his hair, left his strong lips, with their slight commissures, free. Under his wide mouth he had a retreating chin, covered with a short thin curly beard."

Gauguin's relations with Mette, between the short visit he made to Copenhagen after his return from Martinique and his departure for Tahiti, are difficult to affirm owing to the fact that so many of his letters to her are undated. A few obviously belong to this period. How frequently the two corresponded is unknown, and the temper shown by Gauguin's replies to her letters fluctuated as it had done since he had first left Copenhagen in 1885.

At some moment Mette had written to him complaining of his long silences. She was suffering from the continued stagnation of their plans and she felt that she was owed a little more encouragement and sympathy in her waiting than she received. "Your last letters," she wrote, "have been so little affectionate that I really no longer know what to think. You do nothing to give me a little courage and that would not however be difficult, it seems to me. Still, recriminations serve no good purpose. The object of this letter is to tell you that I am far from forgetting you, which is perhaps all the same to you. Write to me soon, I am very worried about you. Your wife, Mette."

Such letters from his wife can have done little to put Gauguin in a happy frame of mind. He knew at last that there is most often no money to be made out of art by the artist and that only when he is dead do others begin to profit by his work. There was nothing that he could do to hurry matters on but to continue to paint, and to hope for an increased demand for his pictures. There was little news that he could send Mette, for nothing happened that was of a kind to give even himself encouragement, and his letters were so frequently unanswered. This he tells her in a bitter letter written from Pont-Aven in the year of his visit to Arles, and the vague, irritable recriminations are continued on his side.

"It pleased you, capriciously, to see me in April 1887, and after my departure you wrote me a warm letter. I never want to believe that that letter was written with a purpose. Once the test had been made at Panama, your letters became like ice. You ask me to give you courage? Where have you need for it if it is not for the fight for material life? To admit the truth, if you had an invested income, you would be the happiest of women. No one to balk your wishes: popular, petted, even courted. . . . I have here and there letters from supposedly intelligent people, full of sympathy, of admiration for me, etc. I am forty. I have never yet received a tenth part of this sort of thing from my family. When your son is of age, shall you dare advise him to marry any other than a cook? If she is a well brought-up woman, she will not give him *la replique pour tout ce qui n'est pas la popote*. Beyond preparing bread and butter, her toilet and idle stories about the neighbours [there would be] no conversation. If your son is more intelligent than his wife, she will hate him. Only a cook will be proud of her husband, will respect him and find it natural that her husband rules the roost."

He seems at times preoccupied with justifying his life to her, now that the planned reunion appears as far off as ever and possibly also since he may have begun to feel that it was never to be achieved. "Schuffenecker flatters me certainly overmuch—you say—and yet he repeats almost what so many say, even Degas, 'He's a freebooter but heavens . . . it is the embodiment of art!' It is probable that those people find in me something else than what you understand, you others, you Danes."

He continues on another occasion:

"You know me: either I calculate (and I calculate well) or I do not calculate. . . . Well, I accept the rôle that I have been given. And therefore I have to calculate. Not to abandon the prize for the shadow, and the shadow is the rôle of an employee. If I were employed at 2,000 or 4,000 francs [a month], the price of your brothers, what would there be to reproach me with? Nothing. I wanted, in spite of the conviction that my

conscience gave me, to consult others (men who also count) to know if I were doing my duty. All were of the same opinion, that my business is art, it is my stock-in-trade, the future of my children, it is the honour of the name that I have given them. Consequently, I work for my art which is nothing (pecuniarily) at the moment (times are difficult), but which I can divine for the future. It's a long process, you all say, but what am I to do? I am the first to suffer. I can assure you that if the people who know said that I had no talent and that I am lazy, I would have abandoned the game long ago." Elsewhere, he continued: "The day shall come when the children will be able to show themselves before anyone, anywhere, with the name of their father as a help and an honour. The children, at the age of twenty, will have to begin earning a living. Do you think that those influential friends whom I shall have gained will not be there to get them started? And I do not think that in business I would have obtained a similar result."

A little comically, he reproaches Mette with failing to write to him, and dramatises their positions. "Our two lives are broken! It is no use crying. The past is never effaced, it is forgotten sometimes . . . without mother, wife, children! Cursed by all my family! Your silence has certainly tried me more, made me more unhappy than my financial reverses." That he was conscious and even hopeful of the possibilities of the future, when once his mind had been made up to go to Tahiti, is evidenced again by another short reference to the past, at about the time of his return to Paris. "The past is never effaced," he repeats, "but one may cover it with the future."

It is impossible to tell whether Mette or Gauguin first chose to inform the other that their two lives were broken, for Gauguin also reproached her for using the expression. It is not possible to believe that either yet believed it, although it was in many ways the truth already.

Mette is told of his proposed escape to Polynesia. There is no mention now of the possibility of this plan preventing their reunion. He speaks to her frankly of founding a new family

there. "May the day come, and soon, when I shall go and bury myself in the woods of an island in Oceania, live there joyfully and calmly with my art! Surrounded by a family, far from this European struggle for money. There, in Tahiti, I shall be able, in the silence of the lovely tropical nights, to listen to the soft murmuring music of the movements of my heart in loving harmony with the mysterious beings who surround me. True, at last, without money troubles, I shall be able to love, sing and die. . . . You are wrong when you say that our two lives are broken. Yours is delivered of all its shackles. Surrounded by your family and by your children, your days pass not without difficult work, but free from obligation to your husband, flattered, respected, loved. Your genius has been remunerated. . . . What could I ever offer you in this filthy country [France] in comparison? A share of misery and work. Those are both things that cannot be shared like good fortune. . . . It is curious how marriage is either successful or leads to ruin or to suicide."

Chapter Fourteen

PARIS AND THE SYMBOLISTS

When he arrived in Paris to make preparations for his departure he went once more to stay with Emile Schuffenecker who had moved to the rue Durand-Claye in the suburb of Plaisance, where he had now an important collection of canvases by Van Gogh and Cézanne as well as by Gauguin. Gauguin was at the height of his physical powers and he was established, in his own mind and in the minds of a small circle of friends, as Master. De Rotonchamp records that he wore at this time a long faded leather cloak, of the type known as MacFarlane, and a blue beret. His coat was usually spotted with paint, under which he wore a thick blue wool jersey decorated with designs in Breton needlework. His wide trousers, bought ready-made for ten shillings in a department store, fell over the large wooden sabots that he had made himself. He had painted his portrait dressed in this way in the canvas known as "Bonjour, Monsieur Gauguin."

This visit to Emile Schuffenecker lasted, however, a very short time. Before the New Year, he left the house of his friend, taking with him, besides his small amount of luggage, the three canvases that Schuffenecker had been looking after for him. For certain reasons that provided grounds for much gossip and speculation, the two men ceased their intimate friendship. Schuffenecker wrote not infrequently to Gauguin for several years, but his letters never ceased to irritate and to annoy Gauguin with their comments and their whinings.

Gauguin took a small furnished room in Montparnasse, in the rue Delambre, where he paid eighteen or twenty francs a month, and painted in the studio of Schuffenecker's friend, Daniel de Monfreid, whom he had met two years before on his return from Martinique.

During these weeks of the late winter and spring in Paris,

before his departure for Tahiti, Gauguin, used now to the company of friends with whom discussion on artistic matters was second nature, made contact with the Symbolists, who had their headquarters at the Café Voltaire, in the Place de l'Odéon in the Quartier Latin.

The Symbolists, with Stéphane Mallarmé who exercised spiritual influence with his dictum: "Suggest, do not state" and Charles Morice whose influence was temporal, were the chief adversaries of the academic literary tradition, dubbed by them 'parnassian,' which in painting was paralleled by the sugary tradition typified by Bouguereau and Carolus Duran. The Symbolists were attended by those art-critics, such as Albert Aurier, who were in sympathy with the various new movements and directions of painting.

Charles Morice has said that it was logical "that 'synthetism' should lead the painter to 'symbolism.' Simplification and an order of composition, that had as their object to render the idea of the painter intelligible, an elimination of the immediate suggestion of direct observation, must inspire in the artist the desire to retain only those aspects in nature where he could read allusions related to this idea and to reunite these aspects in some great image equally liberated from all probability and profoundly, that is to say, vitally and artistically, true. . . . This image is symbolism."

De Rotonchamp, a member of the group, has left an interesting account of those who were in the habit of attending the meetings in the Café Voltaire. "Every Monday, about nine-thirty in the evening, there was a full meeting of all those who took part in this intellectual movement, or who were merely interested. Against a setting of white walls appeared Verlaine, sickly, with his neck enveloped in a twisted scarf and leaning painfully on a strong stick; Charles Morice, the appointed leader of the new movement; Jean Moréas; Albert Aurier, with his dark skin and the long black hair of an Italian Renaissance poet; Julien Leclercq, dark, with curly hair, looking as if he had been taken out of a picture by Giovanni Bellini; Edouard

Dubus; Adolphe Retté; Dauphin Meunier. There also came such painters as Gauguin and Carrière; sculptors, for Rodin was to be seen there; cartoonists, such as the draughtsman Cazals, who, dressed in an 1830 frock-coat, completed this anachronism by borrowing Delacroix's features; finally, those merely interested, such as Maurice Barrès. Carolus Duran, intrigued and curious, ventured one evening into an adjoining room, where he remained for a long time deep in an indigestible periodical. . . . Gauguin was usually accompanied by some personal friends with whom he had spent the day. He willingly took a seat near Charles Morice, Albert Aurier or Carrière, professing for the latter a sincere sympathy, in spite of the profound differences of their artistic tendencies."

These reunions were generally notable for the friendliness and the lack of affectation and of venom in the discussions that took place at them. At the time, however, when Gauguin became intimate with the Symbolists, he had already had enough of the label Synthetist, and his horror of a school of theories had reasserted itself. Gauguin protested almost unnecessarily vehemently against the habit that certain Symbolists had acquired of naming him the leader of the Symbolists in painting, and found an ally against the more ebullient younger members of the group in Verlaine. The poet, who knew the value of the intentional misnomer as a weapon of ridicule, was heard to declare slyly one evening at the Café Voltaire: "He! Zut! They bore me, these 'cymbalists.'" It may be imagined that Gauguin with his "Vive la Sintaize!" must have applauded this sally, and we are told that he did, in fact, show his strong approval by a faint smile. Years later, writing from Oceania, he roundly denounced Symbolism as "another kind of sentimentalism."

At some moment in the early part of 1891, Léon Fauché, who had exhibited at the Café Volpini, allowed Gauguin to try his hand at etching, putting at his disposal his own materials and tools. Gauguin worked at his friend's studio in the rue Leopold-Robert in Montparnasse where he produced

one plate only, the portrait of Stéphane Mallarmé, in the background of which a crow, taken from a drawing by Manet, is shown. There were a dozen proofs of this etching only, on Japan paper, which Gauguin from time to time gave to his friends.

At this same period also, Gauguin made a copy of Manet's "Olympia," which had been accepted by the Luxembourg Gallery. He had for a long time possessed a photograph of the painting, for he considered it to be one of the masterpieces of the nineteenth century. His admiration for it and the apparent difficulty that he found in finding nude models outside a studio such as Colarossi's, persuaded him finally to undertake the necessary contact with the bourgeois museum authorities to obtain the necessary permission. He loathed the Luxembourg, characterising the row of statues that stood outside the building as "an assembly of pillars parading in front of a barracks." Unable at any time to work except in the solitude of the countryside or of his own studio, he found the mass of visitors intolerable and after a week was obliged to finish the canvas elsewhere, probably at Daniel de Monfreid's studio, and thus ended his only attempt at copying the work of a contemporary.

Gauguin, when he was not at the Café Voltaire or at a small restaurant also near the Odéon, the Côte-d'Or, where many of his friends used to eat, frequented the rue de la Gaité, the Montparnasse thoroughfare dedicated exclusively to music-halls, brasseries, dance-halls, and other places of entertainment. A model, Juliette, was his companion at this time. Although not as poor as when he had lived in Paris with his son Clovis, he still was often almost penniless. He ate frequently in cafés, going later to the rue de la Gaité to the Brasserie Gangloff, where "half-a-dozen billiard tables occupied the middle of an immense hall incessantly disturbed by the bellowing of a steam-organ, from which escaped tumultuously . . . an air from *Carmen* and the Overture from *William Tell*." Gauguin, a cigarette in his mouth, would pour

absent-mindedly almost a whole *carafon* of adulterated brandy into his coffee, read the papers a little and talk more readily with friends or colleagues whom chance might also have brought there. Art was his habitual subject of conversation. "How many original observations," de Rotonchamp reflects, "how many just comments must have merited careful recording!" Two of his favourite maxims were: "Line is colour" and "A square centimetre of green in the middle of a billiard table is greener than a square centimetre taken separately." Another: "Ugliness may be beautiful; prettiness, never," is possessed of more universal truth. He also declared: "I am not ridiculous, I cannot be ridiculous, for I am two things that cannot be ridiculous: a child and a savage." To refute the popular contemporary axiom: "A painter must be stupid; paint stupidly what you see," he would reply: "A painter may do anything he likes, provided that it is not stupid." To de Rotonchamp he declared: "There are no 'holes' in nature. All tones, even when loud, join together in an invariable harmony. There are only 'holes' in paintings. These are the 'values' in them which destroy the harmony of the tones by the introduction of elements foreign to colour and associated with chiaroscuro." In support of this theory he would cite the effect produced by Far-Eastern porcelains and oriental stuffs and carpets.

The comparative lack of modelling that was a characteristic of his painting was, therefore, intentional, and admittedly a result of his admiration for the work of oriental artists. His admiration for Japanese prints was sincere; he had found something to admire in Javanese art. It is possible to add this admitted influence as a further reason for his desire to "go to the savages" and forsake Europe. It was this however that was the cause of Cézanne's violent disapproval of his work. Gauguin did not live to know of the angry statement by the man whose painting he had so much admired, and whom he had honoured by refusing to sell the landscape by him that he possessed even when in real need of money for food. "Gauguin," Cézanne is reported to have declared to

Emile Bernard in a rush of the ill-temper that made him so difficult a friend, "was not a painter, he only made Chinese images." Cézanne also possessed the fixed idea that Gauguin was a scurrilous imitator of his work, which did credit neither to his judgment nor to his painting. But this was only one incident in the jealousies and recriminations that Gauguin's work aroused. Emile Bernard, although many years Gauguin's junior, later claimed that it was he who was the Master and Gauguin the pupil, though this claim was grounded principally on the friendly gesture of having once revealed to Gauguin how he obtained his blacks from prussian blue.

To Gauguin these claims were not for ever a source of irritation. In a later letter from Polynesia to his friend Daniel de Monfreid, he was able to say calmly: "When speaking of my work, someone says: 'It is like Van Gogh'; another: 'It is like Cézanne'; Bernard says it is like him; still another says: 'It is like Anquetin or Sérusier.' " Then to flatter de Monfreid, who was never an artistic influence in his life, he adds: "Of all fathers, I have only yourself!"

By the end of January, Gauguin had decided that the only way to find the money that he required for his visit to Tahiti was by public auction of his paintings. He required about 10,000 francs (£400). He chose thirty canvases, for the greatest part his most recent work, and arranged for them to be sold at the Hôtel Drouot, one of the largest auction rooms in Paris.

Through the good offices of Charles Morice, whom Gauguin had met at the Café Voltaire, the assistance of Octave Mirbeau, the well-known art critic of the *Echo de Paris,* was obtained on Mallarmé's suggestion and intervention. Gauguin considered it necessary that an article, as laudatory as possible, should appear in the Press under a well-known name, informing the general public of his plans and the reason for the sale. Morice and Gauguin were invited to luncheon with Mirbeau and Gauguin was able to give the critic all the necessary information. Mirbeau's article appeared in the *Echo de Paris* on the

16th February, 1891, and was reprinted as a preface to the catalogue of the sale. From this article it is evident that Gauguin had a very clear idea of the life he would live or have to live in Oceania. "I have learned," Mirbeau wrote, "that M. Paul Gauguin is leaving for Tahiti. His intention is to live there alone for several years, to build his own hut, to reconsider many things that are haunting him. The case of a man fleeing civilisation, voluntarily seeking forgetfulness and silence in order to understand himself better, the better to be able to hear the interior voices that are drowned by the noise of our quarrels and our disputes, seems to me interesting and touching. Paul Gauguin is a very exceptional, very disturbing artist, who scarcely shows himself to the world, which knows him little in consequence. . . . In spite of his apparent strength of character, Gauguin possesses a disturbed, infinitely troubled nature; never satisfied with what he has achieved, he goes, searching always, for something beyond. . . . It seems to him that there are, there, new untouched elements in art, in agreement with his ideas. Then there is solitude, that he needs so much . . ." The eminent critic went on to misinform the public that Gauguin spent two years in Martinique and that he almost died of yellow fever. A flattering analytical description of Gauguin's past work followed and must have been a surprising revelation to those who read the lengthy article. It ends: ". . . he hopes that the Pacific will have a gentler treatment in store for him, the old and certain love of a rediscovered ancestor. Wherever he goes, Paul Gauguin may be assured that our respect will accompany him."

Gauguin was now, in fact, contemplating leaving for Tahiti alone, for Meyer de Haan's family had dissuaded him from leaving owing to the state of his health, and Emile Bernard was remaining behind also.

The sale at the Hôtel Drouot was a success. The public curiosity had been aroused by Mirbeau's article and all thirty canvases were sold at prices between the nine hundred francs paid for the refused painting of "Jacob Wrestling with the

Angel," and the two hundred and forty francs each realised by a snow scene and a landscape with a rainbow. The sale of "Jacob Wrestling with the Angel" was the occasion of great applause. The total reached was 9,860 francs, or an average of nearly 330 francs (£13) a canvas.

"La Belle Angèle" was bought by the painter Degas for 450 francs. Madame Satre had to wait, however, until 1918, when Degas' collection was sold at auction, in order to realise to the full the pecuniary stupidity of her refusal to accept the portrait as a present.

It was known that a painter, who some time previously had left for a tour of Japan, had been entrusted by the director of the Ministry of Fine Arts with an "Artistic Mission." This was an unsalaried position that held the promise of the purchase of canvases on the artist's return as a token of recompense. A similar and successful application was made on Gauguin's behalf. It was thought that as the possessor of a semi-official position his reception in Tahiti would be made easier for him.

Mallarmé was ill at the time of Gauguin's preparations for his departure and he sent the following short note to him before he left.

> "MY DEAR GAUGUIN,—An attack of influenza that I have caught, but which will not lead, I hope, to complications, prevented me firstly from shaking your hand and, with a look of farewell in my eyes, from seeing again those lovely things of yours that I like so much. Are you fairly satisfied—I have seen no one; at least are you able to count on leaving as a result of the sale? I have often thought, during this winter, of the wisdom of your resolution. Good-bye; I do not write to cause you to reply, but that you should know that I am, from near or far, your friend,
>
> STPÉHANE MALLARMÉ."

Gauguin had now only to make his final arrangements and wait for the next suitable ship. Before he left, however, his




DEMAND

ends from the Café Voltaire decided to offer him a farewell nner, which duly took place on the 23rd March in the Café oltaire itself.

Among the thirty friends and Symbolists present at the nner were Eugène Carrière, Jean Dolent, Charles Morice, lbert Aurier, Saint-Pol Roux, Julien Leclercq, Odilon edon, Edouard Dubus, Adolphe Retté, Alfred Vallette, an Moréas, Dauphin Meunier and Madame Rachilde. De otonchamp notes the significance of the fact that only one erson present, the painter Eugène Carrière, had as yet ceived official recognition from the State by having been ppointed to the Legion of Honour.

The menu has been preserved. There was a choice of two oups, Saint-Germain or Tapioca. Olives, saucissons and butter onstituted the hors-d'œuvre, which were followed by fillets f brill with *sauce dieppoise*, a ragout of pheasant cooked with nushrooms, roast leg of lamb with haricot beans. Brie cheese, ruit and *petits fours* ended the meal. A Beaujolais of no articular year was drunk throughout the evening. Champagne ad been considered, but discarded as too expensive.

Jean Dolent had been chosen to preside at the dinner and mprovised an amusing speech, in which he coupled with the ame of Gauguin that of "his dear and great friend Carrière, the gentle painter of intimacies . . ." Then Adolphe Retté declaimed several "deliciously obscure" stanzas by Stéphane Mallarmé. And finally, Gauguin, in a few words, thanked the company. Charles Morice records that he could scarcely reply to the speeches, and this may have been through emotion or owing to the strain placed upon his voice by over-smoking. Afterwards Gauguin and his friends adjourned to another part of the café to drink coffee and milk.

A final reunion of Gauguin and his friends took place at a benefit performance, at the Théâtre d'Art—the Vaudeville—organised in his and in Verlaine's favour. The foyer of the theatre, for the occasion, had been hung with his canvases. It was thought that in this way a further 1,500 francs (£60)

might be raised for him. The programme consisted of readings of poems and dialogues by Victor Hugo, Lamartine, Baudelaire and Mallarmé, a play by Charles Morice that failed to please the critics, and *l'Intruse* by Maurice Maeterlinck that Octave Mirbeau had praised and few had yet heard. When, however, the expenses of the evening had been paid, neither Gauguin nor Verlaine received anything at all, a blow that Gauguin did not later, when he was short of money in Tahiti, easily forget.

For the moment, however, he was full of confidence. The success of the auction allowed him to think that, at last, a definite market in his work had been created and that it would continue to increase steadily, but probably slowly, in the future; that he needed but a few years of intensive work in the highly-seasoned atmosphere of Oceania in order to find himself and his reputation securely established on his return; that, in fact, his worst days of poverty were over.

Gauguin left Paris for Marseilles on the 4th April. A few friends whose names have not been preserved saw him off at the Gare de Lyon and they were without doubt genuinely sorry to see him go.

PART III

"J'estime que la pensée qui a pu guider mon œuvre ou une œuvre partielle est liée très mystérieusement à mille autres, soit miennes, soit entendues d'autres. Quelques jours d'imagination vagabonde je me remémore longues études souvent stériles, plus encore troublantes: un nuage noir vient obscurcir l'horizon: la confusion se fait en mon âme et je ne saurais faire un choix. Si donc à d'autres heures de plein soleil, l'esprit lucide, je me suis attaché à tel fait, telle vision, telle lecture, ne faut-il pas en mince recueil, prendre souvenance."

PAUL GAUGUIN: *Avant et Après*

Chapter Fifteen

THE SECOND ESCAPE: TAHITI

The ship that Gauguin boarded at Marseilles on the 6th April, 1891, was bound for Australia via the Suez Canal and the French Settlement of Mahé on the Malabar coast of India. It was to be a long voyage with transhipment at Sydney. There he was to obtain a passage for Tahiti in a boat that called also at Nouméa, the capital of the large French Pacific island of New Caledonia.

Before Gauguin had been a week at sea he began to doubt the wisdom of having chosen this route to Oceania. He discovered that the connecting service was of a very irregular kind and that the whole voyage might as easily last five months as three, and, a far more serious point, cost 500 francs (£20) more than he had thought—the amount of money, in fact, that he could have saved by travelling third class instead of second, had he but known that the accommodation was almost as comfortable in spite of the difference in price. Consequently he wrote to Paris to warn any of his friends who might still be contemplating joining him, that they should travel via America, a route that, although more expensive, had the advantage of being far quicker.

He had not forgotten the shadowy Juliette, for he tells his friend Daniel de Monfreid to: "Kiss Juliette tenderly, as if it were I."

There is no record of Gauguin's impressions of any of the places that he saw during this voyage to Tahiti. He arrived, however, in the early morning of the 9th June, 1891, for the voyage had lasted only nine weeks in all, in spite of his earlier fears.

On the ship he had talked with other passengers who knew Tahiti and they had told him things that he had not wished to believe. They had spoken of the islanders as being no better

than the sad relic of a finer race, for now they suffered from diseases, missionaries, modesty, from covered breasts and corrugated iron, from tinned foods and the realisation that their freedom was gone. They were still loving, but many of them were ill. They played the *vivo* still and sang, but they no longer sang so gladly. They had forgotten, many of them, how to build ships. Even their King was deposed. While his mother, the great Queen Pomaré, had reigned there had been a semblance of independence, but with her death and, later, her son's abdication, those of the islanders who thought of such things knew finally that the little of their freedom that had remained had gone with his going.

Gauguin had remained on deck during the last night of his voyage.

The sky before the dawn was opaque and blue, and the stars exaggerated its colour by their brightness. The constellations were bound together by innumerable small shimmering points like the background of a diamanté curtain on which improbably large tinsel stars had been affixed. The shining sea seemed sombre in comparison with the brilliance of the sky.

About an hour after midnight, above the bows of the ship, a great black cloud had begun to rise, shutting out the stars, throwing its crenellated head higher and higher. On the sea and where the cloud sat on the dark horizon, small moving lights appeared flickering in many directions. It was as if the stars which had been hidden had become loosened from the sky and had fallen on the water.

The mail-boat approached Moorea slowly and passed it. As the island receded, the contorting lights became fainter. But another black cloud was coming up out of the sea, larger and darker and higher. The massive profile of the Diadem mountain rose into the sky above Tahiti, while below there were new lights moving and still lights on Venus Point and in the harbour and the town.

With the first colour of the sunrise, a dark silhouette hung over the sea, and the coral reef showed white where the sea

broke over it with a faint roar. The evening before there had been no visible land but now, out of the great breadth of the Pacific, the ship had come, almost it seemed by chance, to these small mountainous islands.

With full daylight the ship passed slowly through the passage in the coral-reef into the harbour of Papeete. Gauguin "after sixty-three days of varied crossings . . . of feverish waiting, of impatient dreaming about the longed-for country," had arrived, finally, in his promised land. It was the day after his forty-third birthday. He had been a professional painter for eight and a half years.

His first impression, however, was one of disappointment. He had expected something more scenically impressive. But if the island, the towering tree-covered summit of a submerged mountain, had disappointed him, it was that it could not compare in setting with the magnificence of the bay of Rio de Janeiro, a memory that had remained vividly with him since the days when he had been a merchant seaman. But a real comparison was not in his mind, for it was obviously impossible. "The island," he wrote, "keeps from the times of its origin a character of solitude and unobtrusiveness that the sea accentuates through its vastness."

When the inevitable formalities connected with disembarking were over, Gauguin determined to lose no time in calling on the Governor and delivering the document that had been obtained for him from the Ministry of Fine Arts before he left. It was worded with all the obscurantisms of French officialdom, but its solitary content was the statement that Eugène-Henri-Paul Gauguin, born here, baptised there, on this day and on that day, the son of this man and of that woman who in their time had been born and baptised, was the executive of an ARTISTIC MISSION, and that he was recommended to Governor Lacascade of the *French Establishments* in Oceania.

At ten o'clock, while the extraordinary news was spreading among the hot gossips of the town and the crowds that had come

to meet the mail-boat and chatter and drink, Gauguin was received by the Governor, upon whom all the local officials were in attendance.

Lacascade was a mulatto, a racial mixture that Gauguin had not expected to find ruling in Polynesia for the French Republic, and he received the artistic delegate from Paris with all the suspicion that his apparently guilty and complicated mentality was able to produce. But, probably, he was no more corrupt than any other of his contemporaries, if indeed he did not himself set the standard of honesty for the islands. Many thought that he was engaged in making money against the day when he would have to retire and he could only imagine that Gauguin was a spy of the French Government sent on an inquisitive rather than artistic mission. He prided himself that he could see through every move of the Colonial Office in Paris in their endeavours to supervise his administration. And when Gauguin claimed that he was receiving no payment for his mission, Lascascade's suspicions seemed confirmed, for no Frenchman in his experience would undertake honest work that showed no obvious reward.

The result of this official disapproval did not however prove an embarrassment to Gauguin, for since his work did not consist of espionage, there was little that the officials could withhold from him. His document had merely served to advertise his arrival and to make him the object of semi-permanent interest until the next mail-boat came and some newer and odder European should take his place. There was one thing, however, that the islanders did not fail to do and that they would have done even if he had not provided them with a certain vague amusement. They gave him a name by which he was to be known to them as long as he was there. It was probably an attempt on their side to call him by his own name instead of dubbing him by some personal characteristic as they did with most of the white people who came to their islands: long beard, red hair, one eye, or anything else that might appear suitable. His name became at once Koké, and

under this name he went to live for the first weeks in a room in a house in the town, not far from the harbour and the Cercle Bougainville and the other haunts that newly arrived Europeans in Papeete frequented.

Certain islands of Polynesia—the Societies and the Australs, the Paumotos or Low Archipelago and the more distant Marquesas—had passed under French rule during the first half of the nineteenth century.

In the forties the island of Tahiti in the Societies had been placed under the protection of France, and Papeete was made the administrative capital of the group. But it was not until 1880, three years after the death of Queen Pomaré, the fourth ruler of her family to bear that name, that the islands were declared a colony of France. Her son Pomaré V was forced to abdicate. He was already middle-aged when he succeeded to the kingship of the islands that his family had ruled since the seventeenth century, and his mother for fifty years. He had been born when European influence was already gripping at the islands and he did not possess the same determination as his mother. It was the personality of Queen Pomaré that had constituted the last defence against complete control of her kingdom by a European power. With her death this defence existed no longer, and during the sad decade after her son's abdication that preceded Gauguin's first visit to Polynesia the last traces of freedom had disappeared. Yet outwardly there was little change, and Pomaré V still lived in his palace in Papeete, a pensioner of the French Government.

But when Gauguin came to Tahiti in 1891 it was to find that even the symbol of that lost independence was about to disappear, for King Pomaré was dying.

The news of the illness of the deposed king had been spreading through the islands of the archipelago, and various signs and portents known to the islanders told them that he would die. They came to Papeete in many different craft. Schooners brought them from islands as far away as Bora-Bora,

Raiatea, and Huaheine. Others came in their pirogues from nearer islands, their sun-coloured sails showing up in contrast with the deep blue of the sea and sky and the white of the beaches and surf. There was everywhere a strange feeling of apprehension mingled with a sadness and a helplessness at what was known to every islander as an inevitable and final happening. Even those whose natural light-heartedness was still undimmed by the advantages of civilisation could not resist the tenseness of the emotions of the others. And Gauguin was to feel the sadness of the event even more than they, for it was the period of freedom that was about to pass utterly with the death of King Pomaré that he had left Europe to discover and enjoy. He had not come to share the splendid period that was now established, the period that the other travellers on the ship had described, heavy with the benefits of the closing nineteenth century.

The signs continued. There were dark markings on the mountains at sunset, fish would not take the hooks, the winds were strange and perverse.

King Pomaré died and his ex-subjects saw him for a last time dressed in the uniform of a French admiral in the death room of the palace. They sang mourning hymns for two days and dressed themselves in black.

The Minister of Public Works appealed to Gauguin to supervise the funerary decorations. The amusement at the unfortunate document that he had brought with him had not yet subsided and the Minister considered that he was lucky to have the opportunity of employing him so wittily. Gauguin went to the palace to see what he could do but there he found the Queen, with the great inborn sense of decoration of the Kanaka race, already busy filling the death-chamber with flowers and stuffs, and he was unwilling to improve on her arrangements. Queen Joanna Marau was middle-aged and stout. She was the daughter of an English Jew named Salmon and a Tahitian Princess, a near relation of the great Queen

Pomaré. She had been educated in England and in France and had been married to the dead king for sixteen years. The lightness of her morals was a by-word in Papeete, and gossip declared that her dead husband alone had had any real respect for her.

Gauguin, when he first met her, did not find her more than a simple coarse woman with traces of some former beauty, but when he was able to judge the islanders better he became aware of her qualities and of the grace and breeding which were inherited from her ancestor, the great chief Tati. She was a large woman with the massive and imposing figure that is found in the ruling classes of her race. The lines of her stout body and of her vast arms led up to her head. It was a massive form that reminded him of the "great triangle of the Trinity." Later, she appeared to him as symbolic of the island, for her body seemed as solidly planted on the ground as the island itself on the bed of the ocean.

The funeral of the King was a mixture of bad taste and unromanticism, affected directly by the discomfort of the sun-helmeted Governor and his officials in the black cloth suits which their knowledge of European etiquette made it obligatory for them to wear. Throughout the night before the funeral each village, grouped together on the grass, sang in turn their *iménés*, part-songs that had derived from Christian hymns. The women's and the men's voices crossed, accompanied by other voices in strange harmonies, while bass voices, mimicking the drums, gave to the whole an individual cadence.

The foot procession left the palace at six in the morning along the road towards Arué. The Europeans talked as if they were going to a fair while the islanders were silent. It was dusty and hot and the white mourners were bad-tempered. Tricolours were carried in the black procession, but the dead King's own standard was nowhere to be seen. The hearse was covered with flowers and drawn by artillery mules draped in black wool net.

When King Pomaré's body had been placed in the new and

gaudy coral-rock mausoleum that the French Government had built in readiness for his death, the white people became silent from heat and fatigue. The mulatto Governor made a conventional speech which an interpreter translated for the benefit of the islanders. Then the Protestant clergyman followed with a sermon. Tati, the Queen's brother, replied. King Pomaré's funeral was over.

Quickly the Government officials packed themselves into the available carriages to return to the town. They were still, as they had always been, indifferent. They would probably have behaved after any half-successful European race-meeting in the same manner.

The islanders came back on foot. Now that the King was buried they began gradually to smile again. Soon many of them were lagging behind the rest and when the river Fatana was reached the returning procession broke up. Some went off in twos for the purpose of making love. Others stopped to wash in the water of the river and pick the white flowers of the tiaré before going on to the town. By evening they seemed to have forgotten that the last symbol of their free past was gone, or realise, now that it had happened, that the civilisation of the West had taken them over finally into its control.

But if it were possible for the islanders to appear to forget that the great period of their history was over, Gauguin was able only to regret it the more. He had arrived in time to witness the last act in a national tragedy and an extraordinary sadness took hold of him. He had come to escape an atmosphere in Europe that he found intolerable, but even in Polynesia it seemed to him that it was impossible to escape the stupidities of the civilisation of the West. It had come and it had perverted everything that it had touched. It had had many decades start of him and what he now found was not what the lying brochure that he had seen in Paris had promised him. In Papeete he found a sordid copy of the atmosphere that he had left behind him, and it was even less tolerable for the addition of a

framework of grotesque colonial snobbishness. But he could not believe that something of the freedom and the naturalness of the Tahitians did not exist somewhere still. In Papeete it was obvious that these qualities were gone for ever. He determined therefore to leave the Europeans and their imported values behind him and to find some place in the country where he could live as one of the islanders.

To Mette he wrote: "I view the death of King Pomaré with much sadness. Tahiti is becoming French little by little, and, little by little, all the former condition of things will disappear. Our missionaries had already brought much protestant hypocrisy with them, and taken away part of the charm. Not to mention small-pox which has attacked the whole race (without spoiling it too much, I must admit). For you, who admire fine men, there is no lack of them here. . . ."

After the manner of the islands, a girl had attached herself to Gauguin as soon as he had arrived. She had come to him without love as any other Kanaka girl would have come. She was named Titi and she was the child of an English father and a Tahitian mother. She had the dark hair and brown skin of the islanders and their look of pride.

Titi accompanied Gauguin in a borrowed carriage when he left Papeete early one morning in his search for a retreat in the country. She was dressed in her best clothes with a red hibiscus flower under her ear and a hat of sugar-cane thread that she had woven herself, decorated with ribbon, straw flowers, and yellow shells. Her black hair hung down her back. She was proud of being well dressed and beautiful and of being seen with a white man whom she imagined to be rich.

Gauguin did not know where he wished to live, so he was content to take the coast road to the south and to drive on until he found a part of the island that he liked. The sea lay to the right, with the encircling coral reefs, and the mountains to the left. The land was green and coloured and unvarying. They had travelled nearly thirty miles by midday when they came to Mataiéa. Gauguin decided to explore the district, for Papeete

felt far behind and the land seemed brighter and more coloured here than elsewhere. They found a hut that the owner was willing to rent to him. This man, because he had no other hut to live in, at once began to build another for himself near at hand.

When Gauguin returned to Papeete to fetch his few possessions, Titi said that she wished to come and live at Mataiéa with him. She was willing to give up the gay and international excitements of Papeete in order to be with him. But Gauguin did not want her in the country. She was not typical of her race, and she was too much accustomed to the ways of the town. She was too tamed and Gauguin could not forget that she was half white. He doubted that he would get to know the true spirit of the country people if she remained with him. There would also be, he knew, other girls at Mataiéa.

But for the following few days Gauguin was obliged to remain in bed with an attack of bronchitis, a relic of the previous winter in Paris. He was impatient to leave for his new home. He was accustomed by now to delays, for things never went very easily with him. His illness was complicated by lung hæmorrhages that were for a long time difficult to arrest, but his chest was strong and in spite of the pessimism of the hospital doctor, who thought that he would die, he gradually recovered with the assistance of a digitalis treatment.

One day, before he had completely recovered, he received an unannounced visit from a niece of the dead King. She was the daughter of Tamatoa, the King's brother, and was known as Vaitoua. Her feet were bare and she was dressed in black, in mourning for the King, but wore, inevitably, a flower behind her ear. She had become too generous with her affections even for a Tahitian and was considered something of a fallen woman. The civilisation of the West had affected her more than her father, who had remained a true Tahitian at heart. He was known as a great fighter and as a Minotaur in love matters, and it was rumoured that in this at least his daughter had taken after him.

Vaitoua and Gauguin drank absinthe that Gauguin had bought for the reception of guests and which Vaitoua herself fetched from the corner of the room. Her dignity alone appealed to Gauguin for she was not lovely. He was anxious lest she came and sat on his bed, for he was sure that it could not support the weight of two people. But when she did so, the bed did not collapse. Then followed a strange staccato conversation full of silences caused by the drinking and the growing intoxication of the drink. Gauguin was not at his ease. The visit was boring him. But Vaitoua knew that Gauguin and Titi had separated and she thought that perhaps she might take her place. She drank heavily. They stared at each other in the rapidly failing light. Then Vaitoua lay down beside Gauguin, smoking, her feet touching the wooden foot of the bed. Her face seemed softened and almost beautiful. Suddenly she began to recite a fable by La Fontaine, "The Ant and the Grasshopper." When she had finished, she got up, for her cigarette was finished also. She did not care for La Fontaine's stupid moralisings, she said. She was on the side of the grasshoppers herself, for they made her think of the gaiety and freedom of the life that her own people had known before the white people had come. Like the grasshoppers, they too had always sung.

Vaitoua stood in the doorway saying that she had drunk a great deal of absinthe, that she did not wish to become and appear futile. Then she left Gauguin as silently as she had come. In the street, a young man called familiarly after her and she answered him, screaming at him in their language tipsily.

She had come to see Gauguin because she had heard that he was ill and that he had no *vahiné*, no girl to look after him. But when she had realised that Gauguin had no interest in her she felt no European emotion. True jealousy was still unknown to her. It was probably the only disadvantage that civilisation could never have taught her or any of her race. It was a symptom only of the benefits of that civilisation, that a princess

of the islands had learned to drink strong foreign drink with any white man whom she might meet.

Vaitoua's voice and the young man's came back to Gauguin to remind him of his disgust with Papeete and of his desire to be away in the country as soon as he was able.

At Mataiéa Gauguin spent the next two years until circumstances forced him to return to Europe. He had left Europe for an indefinite time, but he had not left with the intention of remaining in Oceania for the rest of his life. When he had done enough work he would return to add to his reputation and to startle the bourgeois even more than he had done already.

In front of his hut lay the sea and the white foam on the coral reef bordering the lagoon, the enclosed expanse of water between the reef and the shore. Behind, the rich sloping land rose until it met the mountains, which at this point were splayed open into a deep chasm with a vast group of mango trees growing against the rock face. The earth was deep purple, covered in places with the metallic yellow leaves of a trailing creeper. Sometimes pirogues came to fish in the lagoon opposite his hut, the men almost naked, the women arranging the nets. Beyond, the line of the coral reef broke the blue of the sea with its white crest.

His hut was built of bourao wood, a hardwood that was generally used for buildings all over the island. Separate from the hut was a smaller building where he ate. The kitchen was in the open and, like every other Tahitian kitchen, was an arrangement of stones on the ground that were heated and on which the food was laid and covered. Until the white people had come to Polynesia there had been no metals. No water had ever been boiled and water hotter than that which the sun's rays could heat was unknown. Cooking was only a synonym for roasting. Meat, fish and vegetables were cooked in this way, bound in banana leaves and laid together between the hot stones.

The mountains of the island of Moorea stood out to the right and behind them the sun set rapidly. They were thrown into a high and dark crenellated silhouette against the brightly lit sky, and the lights from the sinking sun appearing in shafts that gradually lengthened and weakened and faded.

At Mataiéa Gauguin found a physical peace, the existence of which had been unknown to him during his stay in Papeete. He felt far from the Europe that he had known and that seemed now like a prison to him. There was a silence at night, accentuated by the occasional playing of the *vivo*, the flute of the Tahitians. In Martinique, night had been a signal to the insects to begin their grating bedlam, but in Tahiti, when the *vivo* was silent there was a true silence. The moon lit up the hut with its high roof of pandanus leaves where the lizards bred, and in the faint light the reeds on the inner walls of the room became distinguishable one from the other.

The life in the country, also, was very different from the life in Papeete. In the town there were shops: in the country there were none. It was necessary to go into the mountains to collect breadfruit or to go to the sea to fish. Money could not buy food.

On the first day after moving to Mataiéa, being hungry and at a loss to know to which part of the mountain he should go to find food, Gauguin saw a Kanaka waving to him to join him at his meal. But through some emotion or idea that he could not explain, he refused. The man was not offended, for refusal in Polynesia is as graciously performed and understood as is acceptance. Almost at once a small girl was sent to him with some freshly cooked food wrapped in newly picked leaves which she placed on his doorstep without speaking. Gauguin ate what had been brought to him. Later the man passed and in an enquiring tone spoke to him. Gauguin was fed, satisfied. The man was pleased. It marked the beginning of a mutual provisioning between him and his neighbours, but Gauguin's share was limited to his presence among them and the interest that that presence had provoked.

Among his neighbours there were Tongans and people from the interior of the island and from the Marquesas islands as well. In the daytime, when he was not working, Gauguin spent his time with them. He was forced to learn their language. From them he learned that if the white people were inclined to call them savages, they in turn also looked upon many of the whites as savages as well, for often they did not even know how to obtain their food. At night, at the foot of the bushes under the coco-nut palms that bordered the sand of the beach, they gathered in groups to sing, the men, the women and the children sitting together and separately. A woman's voice, singing alone, began the cadences of an *iméné*, while the other female voices sang as an accompanying orchestra, and men came in with sudden abruptness, in a tonic key as the song was ended. Or the men and women gathered in a communal hut to tell stories or discuss—this more rarely—serious questions for the improvement of the conditions of the village, that were destined to be forgotten as soon as they had been decided on.

At Mataiéa, Gauguin began to paint for the first time since he had left France. During the voyage from Europe and during his stay in Papeete, he had had no desire to paint and scarcely any opportunity. But the country round his hut and the peaceful environment that he had found joined together to bring back his lost impulse. At last he had before him the natural combination of colours that, since he had left Martinique, he had been forced to imagine in juxtaposition, with the rich brown of the skin of the islanders against the deep vivid green of certain trees and the blue of the sky and sea. But, in spite of this, he was for a long time unable to paint rapidly. The fresh, bright colours blinded him, while the restraints of an over-civilised and degenerated Europe were still with him and prevented him from being able to record the scenes with the speed that their apparent impermanence demanded.

His first model was a girl from one of the neighbouring families. She was of pure blood and, although not pretty

according to European standards, she was beautiful. Gauguin was able to study fully at last the particular character of the Kanaka face with its enigmatic smile that was for him so full of charm. He had brought many photographs of paintings with him from France and had decorated the walls of his hut with them. One day he persuaded the girl to come into his hut to see them. She seemed particularly interested in the photograph of Manet's "Olympia" and Gauguin asked her what she thought of it.

"She is very lovely," the girl replied. Gauguin was moved to think that in Oceania there was more appreciation for the picture than in the whole of the École des Beaux-Arts. Then the girl asked: "Is she your wife?" to which Gauguin answered that she was. It amused him, having lied, to think of himself as the *tané*, the husband of Olympia. While she was looking attentively at other photographs and particularly at those of Italian Primitives that he had with him, he tried to sketch her. But she appeared almost angry and with an irritated "No!" she left him. An hour later she returned in a new dress and wearing a fresh flower behind her ear.

Gauguin painted her hurriedly, fearing that she might not stay long enough for him to finish the portrait. Her mouth seemed to express every shade of pleasure and suffering while her forehead, with its over-heightened lines, recalled to him Poe's statement that there could be no perfect beauty without a certain misproportion of the features. The portrait was finished and, now that he had made a beginning, he was able to find other models with greater ease. But he began also to suffer from a loneliness that resulted in his writing to Titi to ask her to join him. He was diffident before these country girls and women who expected to be taken rather than that they should have to offer themselves. Also, many of them were reported to be ill.

Titi came, but her visit only lasted a few weeks. She was so completely out of her element in the country that Gauguin became bored with her and preferred to send her back to

Papeete. The simple life of the country was beginning to hold him. Titi and everything in her that stood for the life of the town had become already alien to him.

Gauguin now identified his life as closely as he could with that of his neighbours. He began to appreciate their saying: *O na tou* which held more comfort in its combined meaning of *mañana* and *je m'en fous* than he had at first realised. He dressed as they dressed, in a *pareu*, the light cotton skirt that was tucked in at the waist and that reached to the ankles, leaving the chest of the men bare. The women wore it higher, so that it covered the breasts. His bare feet became hardened to the pebbles, and his body sunburned and almost as dark as theirs.

Gauguin soon began to be aware of the importance that the monthly mail day had in the lives of the European population of the island. By November, five months after his arrival, he had not yet received any news from anyone in France beyond a first letter from David de Monfreid. Juliette had given birth to a daughter, a sickly infant, and it worried Gauguin to think that his child should have been born at all under such miserable circumstances.

Although his sale had produced nearly ten thousand francs, Gauguin was not able to leave France with the rest of that sum after the payment of his steamship ticket. He had many debts in Paris that he was obliged to pay before sailing, and, unlike the remainder of his compatriots, he was incapable of portioning out his money to provide against a possible rainy day. When he had money, he spent it. It was a fundamental trait in his character and an incurable one, although there is no reason to think that he wittingly ever tried to cure it. His optimism for the future was as good as money earned. Already by November he was worried by his finances, a forewarning of the incessant preoccupations with money that were to come. He was disgusted at the failure of the performance at the Théâtre d'Art to provide the hoped-for fifteen hundred francs, and he sent a request to de Monfreid to ask the purchaser of a quasi-religious picture at his sale to "fill this gap" until his

return by advancing him a similar sum of money against canvases that he had left behind in Paris.

An impression that Gauguin had received on his first arrival that he would be able to support himself by painting portraits had proved illusory. "In short," he had told Mette, "I believe I am going to earn some money, a thing on which I was not counting. To-morrow I am to see the whole royal family. Such is advertisement! And how stupid it is. . . . Still, let us see . . . Many kisses to the dear children and for you the best of them from your faithful lover and husband." Distance, and the varied pleasures that Monsieur Mothéré has imagined to be the chief interest of his visit, had done nothing to make him forget his family.

For several months after Titi's banishment to Papeete Gauguin remained alone, painting a little and observing the people and the shapes and colours of the landscape closely, hoping vainly for letters that never came.

To Mette he confided many of his thoughts. "As I write to you, it is evening. The silence of a night in Tahiti is the strangest thing of all. It only exists here, without the cry of a bird to trouble one's rest. Now and again a great dried leaf falls, but without giving the impression of sound. It is more like the rustle of a spirit. The islanders often walk at night, but with bare feet, and silently. Always silence! I can understand how these people can remain for hours, for days, without speaking, looking sadly at the sky. I know that all this is going to take possession of me and I am extraordinarily peaceful at this moment. . . . What a lovely night, to-night! Thousands are doing as I am. They live, and their children look after themselves. These people go everywhere, into any village, along any road, sleep in a hut, eat, etc., without thanking, for one day they will be called upon to return the hospitality. And we call them savages! They sing, they never steal—my door is never locked. There are two Tahitian words that describe them: *Ia-ora-na*, good morning, good-bye, and thank you. *O na tou*, I don't care—and they are called savages! Do not

think from this that I am selfish and that I am abandoning you for ever, but let me live for a time like this. Those who reproach me do not know everything that is in an artist's nature; why should they impose on us natures similar to theirs? We do not impose ours on them . . . I think tenderly of you."

And later: "I have your photographs neatly arranged on a shelf set up in my hut, which fact provokes many questions from the Kanakas who come to see and admire my painting."

In another letter, a mood of mixed nostalgia and optimism makes him tell her of a plan that he has in his head for obtaining an appointment in France as a drawing master or inspector, one that would enable them all to live together on his return. "It would be for us, dear Mette, an assured old age, happy and reunited with our children. It would be the end of uncertainty. I need to see you all again and to rest a little. But one must be reasonable. A voyage like this wasn't lightly undertaken as one might an afternoon walk. It must be completed and be the end of my peregrinations. Have patience a little longer, it is for the good of you all."

Behind Mataiéa, in the mountains, lay the plateau of Tamanau from where the great crenellated double-peaked summit of Orohena, the Diadem Mountain, could best be seen, as well as the peak of Aorai. Gauguin's neighbours had told him of this district, so that he was determined to visit it, a determination that, however, surprised and alarmed them, for they feared the mountain spirits and the spirits of the dead, the *tupapaus*, that were supposed to inhabit the interior of the island and to torment those who were obliged to spend a night in the forests. His neighbours' conversion to Christianity had not permitted them to forget their fear. They attempted to dissuade him by telling him that he would find nowhere to sleep, no food, and that the spirits would come to torment him also.

Gauguin left Mataiéa very early one morning, striking inland towards the valley of Punaru, through which a river flowed that joined the sea at a point between Mataiéa and Papeete.

For the first two hours after reaching the Punaru river he followed a path. Then the walls of rock forced him to cross and recross the river, for the valley was in places little more than a deep fissure in the mountain range. At times he was obliged to continue, often neck-deep, in the water. Where the rock walls almost joined it was dark, for little light came in from above, and it was possible to see the stars in the slit of deep blue sky.

About an hour before sunset, Gauguin began to look for a place where he could spend the night. He had come to a wild clearing of banana clumps, bourao trees and wild ferns. There were ripe bananas growing, and he roasted some for his evening meal. Then, after placing several large banana leaves across the lower branches of a tree, as a protection against rain in the night, he lay down to sleep with the thong of his axe round his wrist in case he were obliged to defend himself from a visit from wild pigs.

The temperature fell when the sun had set, for he had reached a comparatively high altitude. He was cold, and his clothes were not yet dry. A strange phosphorescence hovered over the ground near his head, coming from a fungus growing on the dead wood that had remained over from his fire. This phosphorescence, unaccountable to the islanders, was the cause of their belief in mountain spirits.

He continued on his way as soon as it was light. The stream now became swifter and he was sometimes obliged to swing from one branch of an overhanging tree to another in order to be able to make progress at all. In the pools he could see eels and giant crawfish.

At a turning in the rock wall he came upon a young naked girl, drinking at a spring that fell down from a great height. Some instinct warned her that she was being watched and she plunged with a startled cry into a pool. When Gauguin reached the pool she had vanished and the only moving thing in it was a giant eel swimming at the bottom.

By evening, Gauguin came to a point near the summit of

Aorai, the mountain that the islanders feared, for it was there that the spirits were supposed to live. The moon had risen and the words of a sacred dialogue between the god of the Earth and the goddess of the Moon, that his neighbours had told him, came back to him, for he was close to the place where the mythical conversation was believed by the islanders to have taken place. It referred to a time before the coming of a cataclysm that was legendary in Polynesia and that had destroyed mankind.

Hina, the goddess of the Moon, said to Tefatou, the god of the Earth: "Bring man back to life when he dies." "No, I shall not bring him back to life. He shall die, the vegetation of the earth shall die, as well as all those things that are nourished by it, the earth itself shall die never to be reborn." Hina replied: "Do as you wish. I shall bring back the Moon to life." When mankind died, Hina's dominion continued but Tefatou's dominion perished.

Among his neighbours was a young Kanaka named Jotépha who came frequently to watch him paint or sculp, and to ask many questions about Europe. In particular he wanted to know about the habits of the "civilised" white races when they made love and his questions were not altogether without embarrassment.

When in need of wood for a sculpture, Gauguin consulted Jotépha, who knew the mountains well and where certain trees could be found. One day Gauguin was anxious to obtain a large piece of rosewood for a statue that he had in mind. Jotépha offered to lead him into the mountains to a place where there were some large trees. They were to choose one and cut it down, bringing home together the wood that was required.

They left early one morning. The path that Jotépha took lay between two inaccessible basalt spurs of the mountain behind Mataiéa, where a stream flowed through rocks that it had detached on the days when it was swollen to a torrent and that it had carried still further down towards the sea. On

each side of the stream, into which cascades often fell, was a path through the forest of bread-fruit trees, ironwood, pandanus, bouraos, coco-nut palms, and enormous ferns; a vegetation that became wilder and more impassable, as the middle of the island was approached. They walked naked except for their *pareus*, and each had an axe in his hand. They crossed the stream many times in order to follow the path that was invisible to Gauguin but that Jotépha seemed to be able to trace by smell rather than by sight, so completely had leaves and flowers and grasses overgrown it. There was a deep silence, in spite of the plaintive unchanging noise of the water in the rocks that appeared almost as a companion to the stillness.

Jotépha walked in front of Gauguin with an animal suppleness in his body. To Gauguin it seemed as if he could see in him a living symbol of the splendid vegetation that surrounded them, and there seemed to come out of him a scent that filled the air of the forest. Through Gauguin's mind ran a realisation of the thorough difference between them, of their age and origins and race, and of the feelings of friendship that their love of the same scene had produced between them. Gauguin found himself ruminating on the similarity of the sexes in Polynesia, for with races that wear little clothing, the difference between the sexes is much less evident than in more northern latitudes.

In Tahiti, the strong air of the forest and of the sea strengthens the lungs and broadens the shoulders and hips, while the stones of the beach as well as the rays of the sun do not spare the women more than the men. The women do the same work as the men, who possess the same indolence as the women. In the women there is something virile; in the men something feminine. This resemblance of the two sexes makes their relationships simpler while their nakedness eliminates from their minds all idea of something mysterious and unknown. They are unaware of the sense of guilt and of the shameful and furtive complexion of love among civilised peoples. This lessening of the differences between the two

sexes causes the men and the women to become friends as much as lovers, while making incomprehensible to them the idea of vice.

Suddenly Gauguin had the impression that it was a woman who was walking along the forest path in front of him and he caught up with Jotépha, his mind in a strange condition of confusion that had been provoked in him by his thoughts. But the path had come down again to the stream, and Jotépha turned towards him. The illusion was instantly broken and past.

They plunged into the cold water of the stream and went on rapidly into the thicket. Jotépha was unaware of the sudden emotion that had for a moment made him the object of desire in another man. The calm look in his eyes showed that he had suspected nothing. Later they reached a place where a dozen rosewood trees, with vast extended branches, were growing. To obtain a suitable branch, it was necessary to cut down the finest tree. Gauguin felt a wild pleasure as he wielded his axe. When the tree had fallen, he would willingly have continued to use his axe against the rest. He felt that the old "civilised" man in him was destroyed, dead, from that time on, and that this savage attack with his axe was a form of last farewell to civilisation. The purity of the light in the forest seemed to illuminate the simplicity of the life in which he had already done his apprenticeship. He felt that he had become another man, untamed, a Kanaka.

Jotépha and he went back to the hut, happily carrying the heavy block of rosewood. The sun had not set when they arrived. They were tired. Jotépha asked Gauguin if he were happy.

Gauguin was still alone, and in his solitude he was becoming gloomy. He found that his energy for painting was suffering for he could concentrate less well. It was a long time since Titi had been sent back to Papeete, so that he determined to make a break in his life at Mataiéa and to go on a journey round the island.

As he was preparing to leave, Anani, his landlord and nearest neighbour, came to him thinking that he had decided to leave Mataiéa altogether. He was distressed. Europeans came to stay among the islanders and then when they had learned to like and understand them, they would go away. They would promise to return, but such promises were broken. Gauguin told him that he was to be away for a short time only, but at first he refused to believe him and began to cry. Anani's wife joined them, saying that if he were leaving because he had no money he was not to do so, for to live among them he did not need money. She showed him a place shaded by a low shrub near her hut where, when he died, they would bury him. At last he was able to leave, but only when he had reassured them.

He went on foot, inland, passing a village where the islanders lived according to their old customs, and where Hina, the goddess of the Moon, was still unforgotten. At Taravao, across the isthmus that joined Great Tahiti to the peninsular of Taiarapu, a *gendarme* lent him a horse and he rode along a part of the coast where few Europeans went. At Faone, after he had ridden nine kilometres, some islanders hailed him, asking him to eat with them for they knew who he was, the Painter, the man who *made* men. He accepted at once, for the smile that accompanied the invitation was engaging and gentle. He dismounted and his host took his horse, and without servility tied the reins to a branch. They entered a hut where a number of men, women and children were sitting on the ground, talking and smoking.

"Where are you going?" asked a good-looking Kanaka woman of about forty.

"I am going to Itia."

"Why?"

He told her the real object of his journey. "To find a woman," he replied.

"There are many at Itia, and good looking. Do you want one?"

"Yes."

"If you like, I will give you one. She is my daughter."

"Is she young?"

"Yes."

"Is she healthy?"

"Yes."

"Good. Find her for me."

The woman went out of the hut. A quarter of an hour later, while a meal of wild bananas, shrimps and fish was being prepared, she returned followed by a big girl holding a little package in her hand. Through her very transparent pink cotton dress Gauguin could see the golden skin of her shoulders and her arms. Her breasts pointed vigorously from her chest. She did not belong to the usual type, for she was a Tongan. Her hair grew like a young sturdy bush, slightly frizzled. In the sunlight it seemed to have a glint of deep yellow. Her name was Tehura.

When she had sat down opposite him, Gauguin asked her several questions.

"You are not frightened of me?"

"*Aita.*" (No.)

"Do you want to live with me in my hut for always?"

"*Eha.*" (Yes.)

"You have never been *ill*?"

"*Aita.*"

His heart was beating rapidly as the young girl, apparently unmoved, arranged food on the ground in front of him on a large banana leaf. He ate hungrily, but he felt almost intimidated by the presence of this child of about thirteen. He wished he could have known what was passing in her head. He felt so old for her, and he hesitated for a moment, wondering whether she had been forced to agree to accompany him by her mother against her will. But he saw clearly enough in her those signs of independence and pride that are the chief characteristics of her race. Gauguin felt reassured by her serene expression. But the mocking line of her mouth, that was

sensual and tender, warned him that if there were any danger it was for him and not for her.

When the meal was over, he mounted his horse to return to Taravao. The girl followed, accompanied by her mother, a man, and two young women whom she said were her aunts.

After they had travelled for about a kilometre Gauguin was told to stop. He dismounted, and with the others he entered a large, well-kept hut. The floor was strewn with fresh hay on which neat mats had been spread. Tehura sat down beside a young woman whom she introduced to Gauguin as her mother. A glass of fresh water was passed round to be drunk. Then the young woman asked him a few questions. She seemed anxious.

"Are you a good man?"

Gauguin hesitated, but after examining his conscience, answered, "Yes."

"Shall you make my daughter happy?"

"Yes."

"She must return in a week. If she is not happy she will leave you then."

A long silence followed. Then they all got to their feet and the journey continued. Islanders who knew Tehura, spoke to her as they passed, wishing her happiness and luck as the *vahiné* of a European.

Gauguin asked Tehura how it was that she had two mothers.

"Why did you lie?" he demanded, but Tehura's mother answered for her.

"The other is her mother also, her nursing mother, the one who brought her up."

At Taravao, Gauguin gave the *gendarme* his horse. The *gendarme's* wife, a Frenchwoman, who was devoid of finesse, said to him:

"What? Bringing back a strumpet with you!" Her begrudging eyes undressed the girl, who met this insulting examination with complete indifference. Gauguin observed this meeting

between two women of two races and he felt ashamed of his own.

The family farewells were said at Taravao in the hut of a Chinaman who kept a general store. Then Gauguin and Tehura took the public conveyance that put them down twenty-five kilometres further on, at Mataiéa, in front of his hut. Gauguin had found his first Tahitian wife. He was thirty years older than she.

Tehura possessed a temperament that made her appear silent, melancholy, and derisive. At first, Gauguin and she merely looked at each other, saying little. She presented a mystery to him and he was forced to give up any attempt to understand her. He realised fully, at last, the profound difference between a Polynesian and a European, a Frenchman in particular, for a Kanaka does not quickly form affections. When he told her that he loved her, she smiled, for she was fully aware of that, and at times he was able to imagine that she also was fond of him, although she said nothing of it. After a week, she asked for permission to go to see her mother at Faone. Gauguin resigned himself sadly to her departure, for he did not believe that she would return. Tying up some money in her handkerchief, so that she could pay for her journey and take some rum to her father, he took her to the public conveyance. When she had gone, the loneliness of his hut became unbearable. But a few days later she returned.

From this time onwards, Gauguin knew that Tehura would stay with him for as long as he wished. He was able to work again with energy as he received a feeling of assurance from her presence. A time of real happiness had been initiated by her return.

Before beginning his work in the morning, he and Tehura went together to bathe in a stream that flowed into the sea near his hut. When he was at work Tehura kept silent; when he was no longer busy her instinct told her and she would talk to him. Occasionally they paid visits to friends or neighbours, or to relations of the young girl. They would leave at sunrise

to escape as much as possible the great heat of the day and, if the distance were not too great, they went on foot. One day, at six, they set out to walk to Mata, a place that lay six or seven miles from Mataiéa and that was famous for its grottoes. After two and a half hours they arrived. Their friends were not expecting them and they began at once to prepare a feast to celebrate their visit. A sucking pig and two chickens were killed, and bananas and *taros* were put to roast with a splendid octopus that had been taken the same morning.

While the feast was cooking, Gauguin suggested a visit to a grotto, and he and Tehura set out accompanied by three young girls and a young man. The entrance to the largest grotto was near the road, but hidden by guava trees. Inside, when their eyes had become accustomed to the gloom, they could see through the clear water the red earth floor of the grotto that seemed to penetrate the side of the mountain for more than a hundred yards and that ended in a little amphitheatre. From the steep sides, roots of trees which had forced their way through cracks in the rock, hung like giant snakes and seemed to be drinking at the water.

Gauguin wished to bathe but at first his companions refused, for the water was known to be cold. At length, however, they agreed and still wearing their *pareus* they dived in. Gauguin called to Tehura to swim with him to the end of the grotto, but she refused, saying that no one went there and that giant eels lived in the deeper water. The legends of supernatural happenings, of spirits that inhabited the mountains, were still unforgotten by the islanders.

Gauguin struck out alone and swam strongly, but as he swam the end of the grotto appeared to recede. Ripplings on the water were exaggerated in the half light until he was able to imagine that turtles were swimming round him, although he knew well enough that they were never found in fresh-water pools. Pride in his ability to swim long distances and a certain desire to prove that he was not afraid forced him to continue. Later, a cry from Tehura calling him to come back

made him turn in the water; she appeared then no larger than a dark point at the entrance to the grotto. But he went on, swimming for another thirty minutes, and after having been about an hour in the water he reached the end. The bottom of red earth rose into a small ledge. Beyond, the grotto continued on into the mountain for an unknown distance. Gauguin climbed out of the water but he could see nothing, except the blackness in front of him. He no longer had any desire to explore further and swam back to Tehura. The young man and the three girls had gone and Tehura was waiting for him alone. When he joined her, she recited a short prayer and they went out into the sunshine. Gauguin was cold from his long swim and Tehura rubbed his body to bring back the circulation to it. With an ironical look in her eyes she asked him if he had been afraid. Almost offended Gauguin answered that the French knew no fear, but Tehura showed no sign of admiration. As they walked back to the feast Gauguin picked some *tiaré* flowers from a bush that stood between the road and the sea and put them in her hair.

Throughout the whole of this period, Gauguin wrote to Daniel de Monfreid—at first desultorily, later by almost every mail—and de Monfreid was the only friend who wrote to him with any regularity. De Monfreid was not always in Paris to be able to look after Gauguin's requests immediately, for he lived for long periods on his yacht. Like all people away from their home, at a great distance, Gauguin found that the letters he received possessed an importance that those who wrote them could not appreciate. He did not hope that they would contain money only. It was as much for news of his friends and contemporaries that he waited. The mail-boat only came to the island once a month and if an expected letter were missing, the doubt and anxiety had to be borne until the next month's mail was due.

Gauguin's financial optimism did not remain with him long. Money did not arrive from dealers in Paris. Nothing seemed to happen when he was away, and no one bought his pictures. He

was becoming wider known, but this fact did not seem to mean that he was likely to be able to earn a living by his art. Friends who owed him money did not repay it. Others who were successful in selling a picture for him, kept the money for their own uses. They did not write to explain what they had done and why. Gauguin's affairs soon became an increasing worry to him, for the money that remained over from the auction had dwindled with the rapidity that all money dwindled in his hands.

Charles Morice, in whom he had had great confidence as a friend and with whom he had left pictures to be sold and even money that was to be sent to him when he had arrived in Tahiti, sent no word at all, nor any reply to the letter that Gauguin wrote to him. He tells Mette: "I am . . . at the end of my tether, thanks to Morice who says he is very fond of me, but who does not prove it. Since my departure he has given me no news in reply to my letters. He had money of mine and my calculations are completely out on account of his defaulting. The result is that at the moment I have fifty francs in my pocket and I do not know what I am going to do to get back. I can't rely on Morice and on my return I think we shall have an account to settle. I do not like to have my way barred so treacherously. I could have had myself appointed Resident in the Marquesas or at Raiatea, but Monsieur Morice has lost my letter and forgotten what I asked."

In an attempt to find work that would enable him to continue living in the Islands, Gauguin had apparently written to Morice asking him to act for him in this matter in Paris. What Morice did, if anything, is not known.

The realisation that his financial worries were not over affected Gauguin profoundly. He came more and more to live from one day only to the next. As long as he had the means of keeping alive during any given day he felt that he had gained that day. He was content with the tranquillity to be achieved by thinking only in terms of the present. The philosophy of the islanders—a philosophy simplified to vanishing point and

symbolised by a song and a shoulder-shrug—was rapidly becoming his own. He took what circumstances had to offer him and arranged that little around him. He never complicated any day by doing in it something that was better done the following week. There was in this way time for everything, even for the exercise of patience. It was the philosophy of the islanders growing in receptive ground.

But none of his financial worries were permitted to affect the object of his coming to Polynesia, nor, now that he had found a wife, could they seriously disturb him in the way that in later years they tormented him when he found himself ill and alone.

His first important Tahitian picture was called by him, "Ia Orana, Maria," where the chief figure was the virgin dressed in a red flowered *pareu*, with the young Christ on her shoulder. ". . . I have done a painting, a 50 c. canvas. An angel with yellow wings is pointing out to two Tahitian women Mary and Jesus, who are Tahitian also. . . . In the background, a very dark mountain and flowering trees—a deep violet path and the foreground in emerald green; to the left, bananas—I am rather pleased with it."

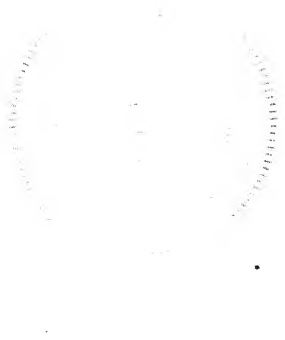
By May, when Gauguin had been nearly one year in Tahiti, his affairs had reached a crisis. He had no more money and did not know whether it would be wiser for him to remain on, in spite of his difficulties, in the hope that money would eventually arrive from France, or whether he should demand repatriation —a right that any Frenchman could exercise who had been in the colony for more than one year. He could not understand why he had heard from so few of his friends in Paris and why, as soon as he left France, it seemed impossible for those dealers who had his paintings to be able to dispose of them. He had left an important painting in the shop of Père Tanguy, an old Paris colour salesman who was a friend of all the painters of the new movements, to many of whom he had supplied colours on credit, or against the security of canvases. He hoped now that Daniel de Monfreid or Jean de Rotonchamp would be able to sell it for 500 francs, as Jean Dolent, for whom

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it had been reserved, had not paid for it. During this month he sent a study of a Kanaka girl's head to de Monfreid in Paris, where he hoped that it would sell at once owing to its novelty and provide him with a little money to add to the money from the Tanguy picture. De Monfreid had been charged to give Juliette a hundred francs from the proceeds of the sale of a camera that he had sold for Gauguin. Now, however, in his search for money, Gauguin decided to give the girl only thirty francs, unless the larger sum had been promised. "I have received a letter from her," he wrote to his friend, "the poor girl is not happy. But I can do nothing for her. . . ."

When his first year was completed, Gauguin made the forty-five kilometre journey into Papeete to lay his demand for free repatriation before the Governor. He had reached his last forty-five francs. To his friend Daniel he admitted that others might think it imprudent of him to wait until the last moment before making his decision, "but that is like me . . . and, besides, every month I expect a few sous from France."

Luck was for once on Gauguin's side. As he was about to go into the Government building, he met a man who owned a schooner and whom he had known two months previously. This man visited all the islands of the Archipelago, trading, and was known as something of a freebooter. To his query as to what Gauguin could be doing, Gauguin replied that he was about to beg his return fare from the Governor for he was completely broke. Without a moment's hesitation the master of the schooner gave him 400 francs, saying that he could give him a painting in return, promising, at the same time, to try to persuade his somewhat truculent wife to sit for her portrait and that if she agreed he would give Gauguin a futher 1,300 francs.

His position was thus suddenly for a time assured. He could now return to Mataiéa to work and to wait for money to arrive from Charles Morice or from some other source.

The public conveyance that should have taken him back on

that day did not finally travel further than about half the distance to Mataiéa and he was obliged to finish the last twenty kilometres on foot. It was about one in the morning when he reached his hut. He remembered too late that the oil from the lamp was finished and that there was no more in the hut, which was in darkness. A sudden feeling of apprehension took hold of him and a fear that Tehura had left him. He quickly lit a match and pushed open the door.

Tehura was lying on her stomach in the bed, terrified, naked, and motionless. She did not seem to realise who Gauguin was. Her fear seemed to fill the hut and it was almost as if some phosphorescent light was glowing from her wide open eyes. The terror of the islanders at being left alone in the dark had taken complete possession of her and for a moment the old island legends of the *tupapaus* had returned to her child's superstitious mind at the sight of Gauguin's face in the wavering light of the match. To Gauguin she appeared movingly lovely.

He had difficulty in reassuring her. Now, when she was calmer, she asked him in a trembling voice not to leave her again without light. Then her fear was soon replaced by jealousy and she asked him many questions about his day in the town, whether he had been to visit the market women who drank and danced and slept with anyone who came their way.

Tehura's moods could change with great suddenness from one moment of quiet and amiability to another that was marked with a kind of frivolous and crazy energy and determination. She was fundamentally little different from the juvenile females of any other continent. She liked to be able to have her way, to obtain an objective, and subsequently she would renounce the objective for the very reasons that had been put forward to dissuade her at the beginning.

Various travelling salesmen passed through Mataiéa, hawking cheap trinkets that they sold to the islanders at high prices. One day a wandering Jew arrived with a box of gilded copper jewellery, among which a pair of ear-rings caught the fancy

of the women of the village. Tehura set her heart on possessing them but the hawker demanded twenty francs, ten or more times their real value.

Gauguin, who caught her look, withdrew into a corner in order to avoid it. But she insisted. "I want them." She repeated the words over and over while her eyes filled with tears. Then she asked Gauguin if he would not be ashamed to see some other woman wearing the ear-rings and told him that already one young man was talking of selling his horse in order to obtain the money to buy them. This Gauguin found too great a stupidity and he refused bluntly. With a beaten look, Tehura began to weep. Gauguin went into the hut and took the twenty francs which he gave to the hawker. Tehura's tears ceased.

Two days later it was a Sunday and Tehura prepared to put on her best clothes before going to the Protestant church for the morning service. She washed her dark hair with soap and dried it in the sun, finally rubbing it with scented oil. Then she put on her dress and put a fresh flower behind her ear, and took one of Gauguin's handkerchiefs with her, holding it in her hand. Her feet were bare. She was repeating a psalm.

Gauguin reminded her of her new ear-rings. Tehura looked disdainful. "They are copper," she said, and with a laugh went out of the hut.

Writing to Mette at about this time, he said: "We shall both soon be old, what shall we do about it then? We shall talk and no longer fear to produce children." Charles Morice's continued silence and a warm reference to him in one of Mette's letters, after an apparent meeting with him, provoked from Gauguin an accusing and yet half-tolerant reply. "You speak of Morice in a very enthusiastic way that shows a mile off that you are in love. Also your letter is much more affectionate than usual, as if you had to ask forgiveness for something. I hope you have only sinned mentally. I can be jealous, but I have no right to speak, being away for so long. I can understand that a woman who passes years away from her

husband when she is young, can have moments of desire, both physical and emotional."

From June until November, Gauguin succeeded in living a precarious life at Mataiéa with Tehura, eating what he was able to afford only when he could afford it. When he wrote again to Mette, he told her so in somewhat self-pitying terms. "I am on the way to spoiling my health with the little food that I eat. But I prefer that to abandoning the struggle that I have begun. . . . For two months I have had to do without any kind of proper food. Every day some *maioré*, a tasteless fruit that resembles bread, and a glass of water. I cannot even give myself the luxury of a cup of tea owing to the dearness of sugar. I am perfectly willing to put up with this state of affairs, but it affects my health, and my eyes that are so important to me are considerably weaker." He does not tell Mette of Tehura for it could have served no useful purpose, but he had warned her before he left France that he might found a Tahitian family. That he was doing so was now his own private affair.

In November, the ship bringing the mail did not arrive when it was due. Gauguin was resigned to living from month to month, always in the expectation of letters from France—and money. He was again without any resources and now at this moment it seemed that a mail, that might at last have contained so much, was lost. But unexpectedly a schooner came in from the Sandwich Islands with the overdue letters that had been transferred from the shipwrecked mail-boat. Among them was one for him from de Monfreid with three hundred francs. Again, he found himself supplied with money at the last moment. Gauguin had already told his friend: "All my life is like that: I go to the edge of the precipice and then I do not fall." It was still a truth that was a constant in his life and was to remain a constant until his death.

A more important letter, if this were possible, was the first that he had received from Charles Morice. His friend,

to whom he had so frequently written, wrote to say that he was astonished to have heard nothing from Gauguin and that he had sent him the money that was due. Gauguin made up his mind to send his reply to this letter to Jean Dolent and no longer to write to him direct to his address, but to ask Dolent to speak to Morice on his behalf. To de Monfreid he wrote in reply: "For the moment the three hundred francs will keep my head above water, but unless I get a big enough sum to make sure of sufficient time, I shall not go to the Marquesas, and that is where I would have liked to have done some work before returning. My health is not good; not that I am ill (the climate is marvellous) but all these money worries trouble me and I have grown older suddenly in an astonishing way. . . ." He also told de Monfreid that he scarcely ate. "A little bread and tea which has made me grow very thin, lose my strength and ruin my digestion. . . . If I went looking for fish or *fei* (wild bananas) in the mountains, I would not have time to work and would get sunstroke. What a quantity of bothers one has on account of this damned question of money. . . ." He concluded with a request for his thanks to be conveyed to the sculptor, Aristide Maillol, for some service or message, adding that Paul Sérusier had written to tell him of the activities of the "new band" of painters. To Octave Mirbeau he sent his remembrances. "He might be useful to me on my return."

At the end of November he had been told by the Governor that he could be repatriated when he wished, for he had apparently decided that he could not continue to hope for sufficient money from France to enable him to stay on indefinitely in Tahiti or to visit the Marquesas and had, after all, put in his application. He decided to leave in January. He put himself hard to work and "laid four fine canvases." But in December, at a further interview with the Governor, he learned that the Colony could not afford to pay for his passage and that the expense would have to be charged to the Ministry in Paris and that a reply could not be received before the

following April of 1893. The hundred and fifty francs that he still had would have to last until then, instead of January only. "I am in all kinds of a state and I only see black."

This further worry did not prevent him, however, from arranging to send de Monfreid a parcel of eight canvases that an artillery officer who was returning to France was willing to look after and despatch by rail on his arrival in France. Carriage had to be paid on arrival and he asked for forbearance as he could not do otherwise. Mette had written to him that she had arranged for a number of his paintings to be exhibited in Denmark and these he intended to be sent to her for it. He gave de Monfreid full instructions for handling the canvases and sent him a list of the Tahitian titles that he wished to be given to them. "For this Exhibition I have made a choice to please every taste: figures, landscapes, nudes."

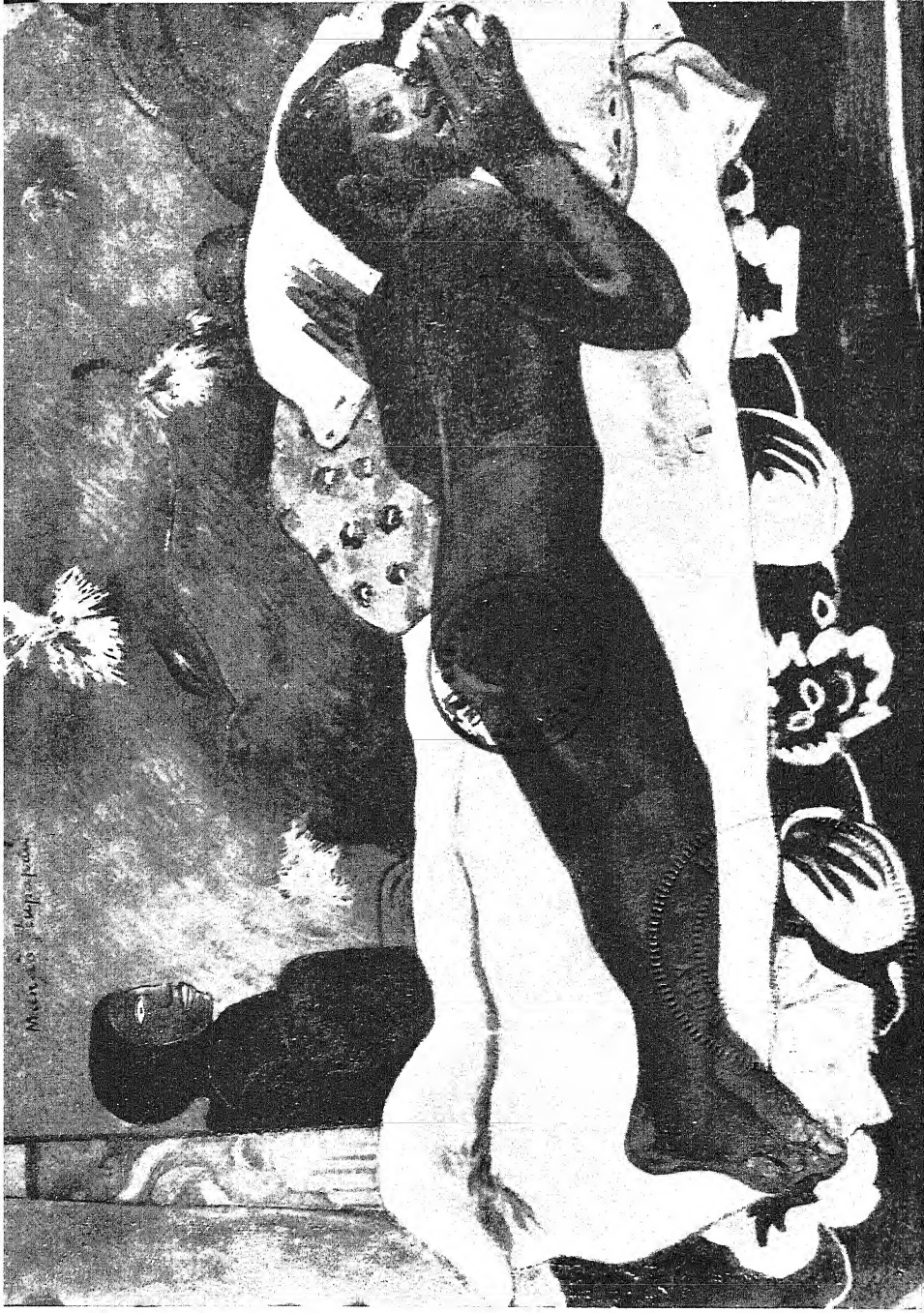
Among these paintings was his canvas of a nude Tahitian girl lying on her stomach on a bed, to which he gave the name of "*Manao Tupapau*"—"the Spirit of the Dead Watches." Of the canvas he had a high opinion. "This picture I find *excellent* . . . it is a good bit of painting although not done from a model." He was not anxious that it should be sold for less than two thousand francs (£80) as he wished to keep it for later. It is possible that it was suggested to him by his memory of Tehura on the evening when he had returned from Papeete, having forgotten to buy oil for the lamp in his hut.

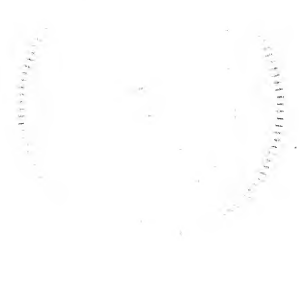
To Mette, to whom he also wrote to tell her of the despatch of the canvases, he sent a full description of the canvas in order that she would be able to explain it, if necessary, to critics at the Exhibition.

"I have painted a nude of a young girl in a position that it would have been only too easy to make indecent. However, I wanted her like that, for the lines and the movement interested me. Now, I have given her a frightened expression. (It is necessary to find a pretext for, if not to explain, this terror in the character of a Kanaka.) These people have a very great fear of the Spirit of the Dead. A young girl at home

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would perhaps be afraid to be found in this position (here not at all). I was forced to explain this terror with the least possible literary means, as was once upon a time done; consequently I did as follows: the general harmony, dark, sad, frightening, ringing in the eye like a funeral knell, violet, dark blue, and orange-yellow. I made the sheet greenish-yellow because the linen of these people is different from ours, because it rouses, suggests an artificial light. The Kanaka woman never sleeps in the dark, but I did not want the effect of a lamp for that is commonplace. The yellow connecting the orange-yellow and the brown completed the musical accord. In the background there are a few flowers, but being imaginary they could not resemble real flowers. I made them sparkle. The Kanakas believe that phosphorescent light at night is the Spirit of the Dead. I put in the Spirit of the Dead very simply, as a little old woman. . . . Here's a little explanation that will make you knowledgeable before the critics when they bombard you with their malicious questions." To de Monfreid he added: "The sheet is in chrome 2 because this colour *suggests* night without however explaining it."

Gauguin's life among his neighbours was little affected by his almost perpetual money worries and he and Tehura took part in the life of the village. When the missionaries of the district succeeded in making a couple marry, the occasion was celebrated by a feast. During these months a big marriage took place at Mataiéa and Gauguin and Tehura were invited. As was usual, the eating of the wedding breakfast was the most important part of the celebrations and a vast amount of food was prepared. There were many kinds of fish, breadfruit with bananas and *taros,* and a quantity of young pigs had been roasted whole on hot stones. The feast was eaten at a long table under a temporary roof that had been covered with flowers and creepers. All the relations of the bride and bridegroom were present.

The bride was the local schoolmistress. She was almost white, but her husband was a full-blooded Kanaka, the son of

the Chief of Punaania. She had been brought up in the Protestant school in Papeete and it was rumoured that the Bishop had insisted on the marriage, for he had interested himself in her and now wished her, a little hurriedly it was said, to obtain respectability.

In a place of honour sat the bridegroom's mother, the Chieftainess of Punaania. She was dressed in a pretentious and extraordinary orange velvet dress that made her look like some character from a country fair. But her awareness of her position and the natural grace of her race gave her a certain grandeur. From her, over the varied smells of food and flowers, came a distinctive sweet aroma, almost overpowering.

Near her sat an old centenarian woman relation whose face was hideous with age and whose still perfectly preserved teeth added to the horror of her appearance. She sat rigidly, almost like a mummy, and on her cheek she carried a tattooed Latin letter that showed that she had once been a victim of the methods of the early missionaries who, in this way, used to disfigure the women in an attempt to keep them chaste by rendering them an object of ridicule.

After an hour's heavy eating and drinking, the speeches began. When they were over, the moment for the old custom of giving the bride a new name had come. The right to this coveted honour was contested by the two families and often the discussion finished by a free fight between them. But on this occasion the company had drunk and eaten too well to quarrel and the ceremony was amicably agreed to and performed.

Gauguin, however, had not kept a strict eye on Tehura. She had been led astray by the other women and at the end of the feast was dead drunk. He was obliged to carry her home. He found her gay but heavy.

Five months after the wedding, the wife of the son of the Chief of Punaania gave birth to a fully developed child. Her parents-in-law were furious and demanded a separation, but their son would not consent, as he loved his wife, declaring

that it was customary to adopt children and that he would adopt his wife's child. The gossips remembered the Bishop's insistence on an early marriage for the schoolmistress, but it was not for long a point that mattered.

By the end of December Gauguin had come once again to his last fifty francs, and for the first time since he had left Bertin's he began to have fears for the future. He had been forced to the conclusion that when he was once again in France he would have to give up painting altogether. These fears he confided to de Monfreid: ". . . When I return I shall have to quit painting which does not permit me to live. I left Paris after a success, small, but still a success. For eighteen months I have not seen a penny from my painting, which means that I have sold less than before. The conclusion is easy to draw. And since I have no greater prospects of inheriting money, how shall I eat and buy my colours? Of course, I'm going to bring back some canvases! But these canvases are progressive: that is to say, less saleable than before. If Van Gogh from the Goupil Gallery were not dead, I don't know. Meanwhile I'm in a hole. . . . I have just done three canvases . . . I think they are my best, and as it will be the 1st January in a few days, I have dated one, the best, 1893. For once I have given a French title, '*Pastorales Tahitiennes*,' as I could find nothing to correspond in Kanaka. I don't know how—although I have used pure veronese green and vermilion—but it looks to me like an old Dutch picture—or an old tapestry. What should I attribute that to? Besides, all my canvases seem dull in colour. I think that is because I can't see one of my old canvases or a picture from the École des Beaux-Arts to see the difference. What a memory! I am forgetting everything. Over-indulgence in tobacco, I expect. When I'm back I shall have to see about that."

Gauguin had had news from Juliette. Their child was stronger. "It appears that my new offspring is getting on splendidly. Juliette has sent me her new address and news of the child." Any

money that Daniel might have had for him was to be kept until April, when he hoped to leave for France.

The next two months were extremely difficult. In February he heard that he could not be repatriated for at least three more months. But more bitter news than this was the information that Joyant of Goupil's sent him with a statement of account from the gallery, that Charles Morice had been given money almost two years before to send to him. "Joyant," he told de Monfreid, "had sold 1,100 francs' worth of paintings immediately after my departure . . . I confess that I am stunned by discovering this theft. For it is one."

Gauguin could not resist telling Mette, who had committed the sin of liking Morice, of this proof of Morice's treachery. "Joyant has sent me my account from Goupil's. He gave Morice 850 francs to send to me and that in May 1891, which means that Morice has stolen 1,350 francs from me. . . . I have received five lines from Morice who appeared astonished at my silence, claiming to have written to me often and to have sent me my money. A lie! . . ." It did not seem credible to Gauguin that his letters to Charles Morice could all have gone astray and that the money and frequent letters which Morice said that he had sent to him should have gone astray also. It was more remarkable still that of all Morice's letters, the only one to arrive should have been the one that told of all the others.

Mette wrote to say that she had sold pictures in Denmark for nearly a thousand francs, but that she had needed the money and excused herself for not sending it to him. To de Monfreid he said: ". . . What can I say? It seems that in the north my success is growing quickly. A London artist told her that an exhibition must be held in England. I must come back to see about all that. God, how furious I am! It's anger that keeps me going. After this letter, do not write any more. Should you have money to send me, keep it with the greatest care. You tell me that Schuffenecker has written to my wife—why? it would have been better, knowing how I'm placed, to

have sent me my fare. I would willingly pay 20 per cent on my return and I'd still be up. But there are some people who never know how to be useful in time, and who don't recognise a good bit of business. They prefer to invest in Panama loans in the hope of a little profit. . . . Poor Aurier is dead. We certainly have bad luck. Van Gogh, then Aurier, the only critic who really understood us and who one day could have been very useful."

With the coming of the rainy season began the only period of real activity on the island. The flies, that at other times were not very abundant, became almost a plague and heralded the arrival off the reef of huge shoals of tunny and *bonito* from the open sea. For three weeks every man, woman and child was occupied with preparations for this event. Long coco-nut-leaf barriers were built in the shallower water between the beds of coral, and fish-bait, that the big fish took greedily, was collected. When everything was ready, two large pirogues were fastened together carrying in front tackle that consisted of a pole with a baited hook which could be raised in the air by pulleys as soon as the big fish had bitten. In this way the fish were lifted completely from the water.

The pirogues left the lagoon for the open sea, passing out through a passage in the reef, and went far out to meet the shoals. Every man was happy and paddled with energy. A huge flock of sea-birds flying over a certain piece of water and attacking the fish fiercely when they broke surface showed where the shoal had reached. The sea was very deep at this point and was known as the *trou aux thons*—the Tunny Hole—and it was in these great depths of water that the islanders believed that the fish slept at night, out of reach of the sharks.

The pirogues went through this huge shoal. The islanders did not however use deep-sea lines, for the Hole was the home of Rana Hatou, the god of the sea, and was sacred. The tunny did not always take the hook immediately and even when a big fish had been secured sharks often attacked it

before it could be lifted from the water, leaving only the head to be dragged on board.

Gauguin accompanied the fishermen from his district to the *trou aux thons*. There were eleven in the pirogue with him. Each man in turn cast the hook. At the end of the day Gauguin had been the most fortunate of them all, having landed two of the largest fish out of the ten that had been taken. But at each of his two captures Gauguin had noticed subdued laughter that he was at a loss to understand.

The pirogues set out for land before the sunset, when all the bait had been exhausted. Gauguin chose this moment to discover why his two captures had caused amusement among the others. After persisting with his questioning, he was told that if a fish were taken with the hook in its lower jaw, as had happened in both cases with himself, it was a sign that the *vahiné* of the man who had cast the hook had been unfaithful to him during his absence.

The men paddled for two hours, chanting together as they worked. It was dark and the wake of their pirogues was phosphorescent. Sharks followed them as far as the foaming entrance to the lagoon. On land many flaming torches made from dried coco-nut leaves were moving. The family of each man was waiting for him. The edge of the sea and the sand were bright with the light from the torches, while some of the watchers sat and others moved up and down shouting cries of welcome.

The pirogue met the sand with a final bound.

The fish were divided among all those who had assisted in the preparations. Tehura took the portions of the fish that had been allotted to Gauguin and herself. She cooked one for Gauguin, but ate her own portion raw. After telling her about the fishing, Gauguin was no longer able to withhold the question that he had wished to ask her since he had learnt the reason of the others' laughter.

They were lying together on their bed.

"Have you been good?"

"Yes."

"And your lover to-day, was he to your liking?"

"I did not have a lover."

"You lie, the fish have spoken."

Tehura got to her feet and stared at Gauguin, who saw that her child-like face had taken on an unexpected look of mysticism. Then she closed the door and coming back to the middle of the room, recited a prayer. She was naked.

"Save me! Save me!
It is the evening; the evening of the gods.
Watch over me, O God, near me, O Lord,
Guard me from temptation and ill-advice,
Guard me from sudden death,
From wishing evil or from execration.
Guard me from secret plotting
And quarrels over the division of land.
May peace be around us.
O God, guard me from the angry fighter,
From him who, when angry, wanders,
Who takes pleasure in causing fear,
Whose hair is for ever bristling.
May I and my spirit live,
O God!"

When she had finished speaking, she went up to Gauguin. Her eyes were full of tears:

"You must beat me, beat me for a long time."

Gauguin could not lift his hand to strike something that appeared to him so beautiful at that moment. The colour of her skin made her appear to be clothed in a yellow-orange garment.

She said again: "You must beat me, beat me for a long time, otherwise you will be angry for a long time and will be ill."

Gauguin kissed her, repeating to her the words of Buddha: "Violence must be overcome with gentleness; evil with goodness; falsehood with the truth."

In the morning one of Tehura's mothers brought some fresh coco-nuts to the hut. Gauguin could see in her look that she knew of Tehura's infidelity.

"You went fishing yesterday?" she asked. "Was everything all right?"

By the March mail-boat Gauguin received a small sum of money from de Monfreid, which came at a moment when he had nothing left. He had made arrangements for leaving Tahiti on a warship that was to take him as far as Nouméa in New Caledonia and he told his friend in his letter of reply: "Whatever happens, I embark on May 1st for my native land. I have managed at last to find someone to whom I shall pay interest, and give some canvases as a guarantee, who will lend me the money for my fare in the event of the French Government sending a refusal. I must leave then, for otherwise by America it would cost me more than double by Nouméa. And the warship that is going to Nouméa in May does not go there often. Apart from that, there is nothing new to tell you. On my arrival at Marseilles it is possible that I shall telegraph to you to send me the necessary money for the railway journey. Consequently move *heaven and earth* to get me money. You have two months. As soon as I arrive I *undertake* to repay it."

A fortnight later, Gauguin told de Monfreid of a new plan, of a visit to the Marquesas Archipelago before returning to France. He was writing on the 31st of March. On this same day, ten years later, when he had been for eighteen months a resident in the Marquesas, he was to receive the sentence that hurried on his death. But for the moment the idea of going there was more an idea than a possibility.

"Since I've received your letter and since I am writing to you, it means that I'm still here. . . . Each mail I expect the cash which Morice has of mine. No news from him in spite of the letter I wrote five months ago. . . . I'll know how to settle that account when I get back. Then besides him, there might be some money by the next mail from Tanguy, or Portier or Joyant. Without any doubt I must go and work in

the Marquesas for a few months before my return to see a real savage at last! Thank God you received the study that I sent you. . . . It is a step towards better work; you found it superb, all to the good. It is by me, you know, not by Emile Bernard. . . . At the moment I'm carving tree trunks into savage bibelots. I have a piece of iron wood that I'm going to bring back that has worn away my fingers, but I'm pleased with it, and, you know, it is not by Emile Bernard. . . . I have received a letter from my wife who sold four canvases, including one that is quite unimportant (a small Breton head), for 1,500 francs as soon as she got back to Copenhagen, and was hoping to sell the rest soon. Some money at last, you'll say. But my poor wife needed it. That doesn't matter. Things are going all right for me in Denmark. . . . Yes, in Denmark, there are piles of *imbéciles* who believe the papers now that they have decided I've got ability. . . . I wrote a long time ago to de Haan. No reply. Have you news of him? Apart from you I get no letters. You are a faithful correspondent and I am very grateful to you. You cannot imagine how sad it is not getting letters when one is so far away. . . .

E nei manao vau, tirara parau
Ia ora na

Which means that I've finished chatting and that I greet you. I speak Kanaka pretty well now and I find it very entertaining."

Mette had at last also been successful in finding, in a Danish painter, a buyer for the canvas of a female nude that Huysmans had praised so highly when it had been exhibited in 1881. She received nine hundred francs for this, but as she needed the money she kept it all. Mette also sent him news of his son Emile, now eighteen and a half and over 6 ft. 4 in. tall. Gauguin was delighted. Emile was now his eldest son, for Clovis, who had never been strong, had died before he was twenty.

Tehura, meanwhile, was expecting a child. Gauguin was not worried about its future. In Tahiti a child was considered to

be the best present that it was possible to give, and there was always competition among the infant's relations, even before its birth, for the right to adopt it.

Nearly two years had now passed since he had come to Tahiti. In all, he had painted sixty-six canvases and made a few "ultra-barbaric" sculptures. It was, he felt, enough for one man. His idea of quitting painting on his return was, however, still in his mind. This resolve, that may have come from a certain frame of mind in which dramatic effect and self-pity were not absent, was more likely an open threat calculated to call attention to his penniless condition than a true statement of his intentions. It is not heard of again.

By the next mail Gauguin received an unexpected remittance of 700 francs from de Monfreid, but it had come too late for him to carry out his new plan. "If I had received that a month or two ago, I would have gone to the Marquesas to complete my work, and the most interesting part of it. But I am tired, and the boat for the Marquesas only leaves in a month and a half. Besides, I expect by the next mail the confirmation for my voyage, etc. . . . I shall give up the Marquesas and land one of these days in Paris. I wrote to Sérusier some months ago giving him a reply to give to Morice; I've had no news. Did Sérusier receive my letter? God, how difficult it is dealing with things by correspondence. . . ."

The continued silence of nearly all his friends was made a little less difficult to bear by the prospect of his return to France. He had a great deal to do and to clear up when he was back. News that had been so long in coming could now well wait a little longer.

Gauguin probably left Tahiti on the 1st May as he had intended. There had already been several delays, but this time he managed to avoid a further long postponement. It would appear probable that the reply from the Ministry in Paris was unfavourable and that he was forced to borrow for his fare from the source that he had already mentioned.

His return to France meant his separation from Tehura, for

there was naturally no question of her accompanying him. For several nights before he left she cried, but she came to Papeete with him, to see him off, sad and calm. As the ship drew away, Gauguin saw her sitting on the stone edge of the quay with her large strong feet dangling in the sea water. The flower that she had put behind her ear earlier in the day had fallen on her knees, for it had faded. Perhaps she had not yet given birth to her child, for she was alone.

Chapter Sixteen

"LE CAHIER POUR ALINE"

Paul Gauguin's views on life were characterised by an independent and special vision, and it had never been in his nature to consider the conventions—to him the restrictions of an imbecile mentality—when he discussed them or put them forward. His daughter alone among his children had shown any sign of understanding him or of having an apparent confidence in him as a painter. With his love for her and his gratefulness for this confidence came a desire to record for her the essentials of his observations of life and of his own philosophy, so that when she was grown up there might be nothing about him that she would not know and therefore understand.

He began recording certain things during his last few months at Mataiéa, noting them in a small school copy-book. He drew a head of a young Polynesian girl on the cover and coloured it, adding in large figures a date, 1893. Inside was a dedication to Aline, while the contents he described as "Scattered notes like Dreams without sequence, like the component parts of Life," a phrase that he used more than once in his writings.

The contents of the notebook touched on every subject, and were added to from time to time. Perhaps as he was writing for a young woman, and as he was her father, he felt a special need to record his philosophy with regard to women. It is not known at what age he intended giving the notebook to Aline. Mette would, undoubtedly, have considered the notebook improper or unnecessary at any age but it was not intended for her, but for a younger woman, of a younger generation, who had shown a very different capacity for understanding him than she.

"The nature of woman," he told Aline, "is love, but this love is one that conceives, and in conception gives itself

completely. Woman only attains her full individuality at the moment when she gives herself. The day when her honour is no longer placed beneath her navel, she shall be free, and perhaps also in better health." And elsewhere he added: "In Europe, human intercourse is a result of love. In Oceania, love is a result of intercourse. Which is right? He or she who gives their—— commits a little Sin, and that even is debatable. In any case, Sin is completely redeemed by the most beautiful act in the world, creation, an act that is divine in the sense that it is the continuation of the work of the Creator. He or she who sells their body commits therefore a true sin. This act of venality degrades them and places them below the animals."

The attitude of the world to sex had always been of profound interest to Gauguin. His own interest in it he had placed among his three cardinal occupations and like many who possess a physical necessity in excess of their neighbours he had also a greater understanding and tolerance for its many manifestations than those sections of the world whose interest is secondary or minimal. More perhaps as a general statement of his views than as a private note for his daughter, he asked: "Was it really God who punished Sodom? For myself I believe it was a woman. Otherwise Lesbos would not have survived. For what purpose do legislators meddle, I would like to know? Where does vice begin, where does it finish? If there are revolting vices, it must also be admitted that the liberty of the flesh should exist. Otherwise it is a revolting slavery."

His attitude towards capital punishment provoked an original thought: "The executioner is a murderer; nothing more or less, provided that he kills in order to earn his living. The assassin who kills to earn his living is more worth while than the executioner, for he has risks and the executioner has none."

The memory of his poverty and suffering in the winter of 1885–86 with his son Clovis had never left him. Aline could have known little of it at that time, but must have heard of it, particularly when Clovis had died, for Mette had felt that his death was in part due to those privations. The

consequences of such suffering would be unknown to her still and Gauguin tells her: "I have known extreme poverty, that is to say being hungry, being cold and everything that results from that. It is nothing, or almost nothing; one becomes accustomed to it, and with perseverance one ends by laughing. But what is terrible in poverty is the hindrance to one's work, to the developing of one's mental faculties. It is true, on the contrary, that suffering sharpens genius. But one must not have too much however; otherwise it will kill you."

He tells her of his political views, which were not very stable, but republican on the surface, and democratic. His deeper instinct allowed him to admire good manners, politeness, beauty, fine tastes, and the old-fashioned belief that the possession of high birth entails responsibility. His instincts were therefore the reverse of his more worldly convictions. He felt that Art was only for a minority and that all great works of Art had been the result of the encouragement of rich patrons, or potentates of various hues. "I believe that every man has the right to live and live well in Society, proportionately to his work. The artist cannot make a living, therefore Society is criminal and badly organised." Gauguin's views were formed by his own problems, but it cannot be claimed that his problems were exceptional.

In the moments when his thoughts took the direction of the metaphysical world his conclusions became, however, obscure in proportion to the facility with which he noted them. His attitude towards religious belief had always been tolerantly agnostic although, and possibly because, he was better acquainted with the Bible than with any other book. It is clear that his perpetual discarding of conclusions and experiences as soon as they failed to prove helpful or conclusive was an expression of a desire to improve on what had gone before, to prepare for the future, but also an expression of the nervous energy of his overloaded and somewhat illogical mind. "If I look before me into space I have a kind of vague consciousness of infinity and yet I am the point where it begins. I can

understand then that there was a beginning and that there shall be no end. In this I do not find the explanation of a mystery, but simply the mysterious sensation of a mystery. It is true that a sensation is not a Truth, and this sensation is intimately joined to the belief of an eternal life promised by Jesus. If, however, we are not beginning when we enter this world, we must believe with the Buddhists that we have always existed. A change of skin. Which is odd." Here and there are interpolated reasoned maxims which, if they do not all appear to be original, at least cannot be refused as a proof of a patient side to Gauguin's nature. Of these, one at least was the declaration of a creed without which he would never have been able to withstand the chicaneries and betrayals over money matters that instantly began as soon as he was safely away from France. "The man," he said, "who has confidence [in others] only suffers when he has been deceived and he discovers it. He who is mistrusting suffers all the time from his mistrust."

The *cahier* for Aline lacks humour, but in so serious a collection of odd reflections he probably did not find place for it, and he was aware of his daughter's earnest and enquiring nature. The nearest approach to a lighter mood was a comparative memory of conditions when he was a child and of the conditions surrounding the office of the Governor of Tahiti. "*Chez Grand'maman* one smoked and laughed," he wrote. "*Chez* the Governor of the *French Establishments* in Oceania, one does not smoke, one does not laugh, one yawns. *Chez Maman*, the only person in a uniform when we dined was the servant, and he did not understand what was said. *Chez* the Governor [the Taratata] in Tahiti, the only person who is not in a uniform is the servant, and no one listens to the thrusts of wit of the Taratata but the servant, who smiles. How everything changes!"

How long Gauguin added to his daughter's *cahier* is only to be conjectured. He kept it with him, waiting possibly to give it to her, if he remembered, when she was older. It was found among his papers on his death.

Chapter Seventeen

THE MAGNIFICENT INTERLUDE

Gauguin arrived at Marseilles on the 3rd August, 1893, after an absence of two years and four months, with four francs in his pocket.

The voyage had been expensive and uncomfortable. At Nouméa he had been obliged to wait twenty-five days and to spend the time uselessly in an expensive hotel and to pay extravagant sums for the shipping of his canvases and sculptures. When at last he had been able to obtain a passage, it had been in a troopship with three hundred soldiers who were returning to France. The accommodation was so limited and there was so little deck space that he found himself obliged to pay a supplement and to travel second-class. At Sydney, the weather had been very cold and the sea continuously rough as far as Mahé. The heat in the Red Sea had been so great that three men had died.

As soon as he landed, he wired to Joyant of the Goupil Gallery and to de Monfreid, asking for money to continue his journey to Paris. He wrote immediately to Mette: "I have just enough in my pocket for a telegram and a carriage to take my luggage to an hotel where I shall await money. I have a certain weight of luggage, paintings and sculptures, that will be expensive. . . ." and ". . . you will have a husband to embrace who is not too dried up or worn out."

As an afterthought he enquired at the Poste Restante for letters. He found that de Monfreid had written there to tell him that he was not in Paris. The letter probably contained money, for two days later Gauguin reached Paris, where for a short time he stayed in his friend's studio. He found that Joyant had left Goupil's and that most of his friends were away also, and he almost regretted his return.

An event now happened that compensated him for his

temporary disappointment. During the years since his mother had left Uncle Zizi's house at Orleans to live at Saint-Cloud, and since her death, the little old man had continued to live there. Within a few days, however, after Gauguin's arrival in France "he had the wit to die." Doubtless Gauguin's sister Marie, who had married and who now as Madame Uribe lived in Bogotá in Colombia, also shared in Isidore Gauguin's estate, but Gauguin nevertheless found himself in possession of from ten to thirteen thousand francs. With a new sense of security and optimism he wrote to Mette suggesting that she should come to Paris with "little Paul" for a short visit. He also considered financing an exhibition of his Tahitian paintings and made enquiries for Juliette's address.

By the middle of September Gauguin had been able to settle his uncle's estate at Orleans and return to Paris to make arrangements for the proposed exhibition. Owing to Joyant's retirement from the Goupil Gallery, Gauguin decided to hold his exhibition elsewhere. He arranged for this with Durand-Ruel, the owner of a Gallery that had begun to deal in the Impressionists.

Mette wrote to tell him that the result of showing his Tahiti canvases in Copenhagen had been disappointing. They had had a certain success with painters there, but the public had bought none of them. This news did not encourage him, for Denmark had recently been a better market for his work than France.

While awaiting his legacy, he decided to rent a studio in Montparnasse. He found one in the rue de la Grande Chaumière, and paid a quarter's rent in advance with money borrowed from a certain Madame Caron who kept a milk-shop in the same street, frequented by students of the Colarossi Academy, and who possessed a small collection of paintings, formed, perhaps, partly against her will as presents or in settlement of debts. From de Monfreid he asked for an easel and a chair. It was a cold September.

As soon as Gauguin received his legacy he began to spend it.

The few hundred pounds could have provided no appreciable yearly income, and this sum was, besides, the only ready money that he possessed. He had, moreover, always spent money.

Mette, to Gauguin's surprise and disappointment, did not come to Paris, nor did she write again. "Really," he told her, "I understand less and less. You know my address in Paris since you sent me a telegram to my new place, and you have not been able to find time to write a word! Everyone I see in Paris asks me how you are, and I do not know what to reply. Really, now, what is wrong? Why have neither Emile nor yourself come to Paris to see me? That would not kill you. . . ." Gauguin had told Mette to borrow from her family the money for her fare when he had first suggested her coming. He does not now seem to have offered to pay her fare himself, although he undoubtedly could have done so. Mette later demanded that half the legacy from Uncle Zizi should be paid to her for their children, a request that he refused with determination, as she had shown no sign of wishing to accede to his request that she should join him. At this moment, however, Mette was more probably held back by her family than by being unable to find money for her ticket. Later, Gauguin sent her a share of the legacy, but 1,500 francs only instead of the six thousand that she claimed.

Gauguin soon became dissatisfied with his studio in the rue de la Grande Chaumière and moved to larger quarters in the rue Vercingétorix, a street that joined the Chaussée du Maine near the Montparnasse cemetery.

The exhibition of his Tahitian paintings that he had arranged to hold at the Durand-Ruel gallery took place in November. Soon after his return from Orleans Charles Morice had written asking for an interview to put an end to a situation that was causing him much pain. The interview had resulted, it would appear, in a complete restoration of their old friendship, for Morice wrote the preface to the catalogue that was prepared for the exhibition. Forty-four paintings were shown, as well as two sculptures. The exhibition

was far from being a success, although the number of visitors was considerable. Stéphane Mallarmé remarked that it was "extraordinary that one can put so much mystery into so much brightness." The general public had become almost accustomed to his less vivid Brittany canvases and the sudden burst of colour that it now saw disconcerted it considerably. Only eleven canvases were sold. Many visitors were profoundly shocked by what they considered to be unwarranted audacities of colouring. They were unwilling to admit that any artist had the right to paint a dog red, as Gauguin in one of his canvases had done, even in a painting of a scene as unknown and as unsuspected as a Tahitian landscape.

Gauguin endeavoured to give the public an intelligible explanation of his new intentions and subject-matter, but without any marked success. ". . . Wishing to suggest a luxuriant and riotous scene in nature, a tropical sun that sets fire to everything around it, it was very necessary for me to give such a background to my figures. It is a life in the open air, but, however, an intimate life in the thickets and in the shady streams, where women whisper in an immense palace decorated by nature herself with all the riches that Tahiti owns. Hence all these fabulous colours, and glowing light, but purified and silent. 'But all that cannot exist!' 'Yes, it exists, as an equivalent to the grandeur and depth and mystery of Tahiti when it is necessary to express these things in a canvas a yard square.'"

His daughter Aline's birthday on Christmas day was this year the occasion for writing her a letter, the only one that he wrote to her that has apparently been preserved. "Dearest Aline, how big you are getting! Sixteen, I even thought it was seventeen! Were you not born on December 25th, 1876? You do not remember, and naturally, but I can remember you as a very small, quiet child, opening your very bright eyes. That is how you will always remain, I think. Mademoiselle is to go to a ball! Do you know how to dance well? I hope very nicely and that there are young men to talk to you about me, about your father, for that would, in a way, mean that they admired you. Do you

remember three years ago when you told me you would be my wife? I sometimes smile when I remember that. You ask me if I have sold many paintings. No, unfortunately! Otherwise, I would have been so happy to send you for your Christmas tree some pretty things. Listen, my poor children, you must not have too great a grudge against your father if there is not a great deal of money at home. A time will come perhaps when you will know what is best in this world."

Gauguin was by no means ungenerous, and his attitude towards sending his daughter presents for her Christmas tree can only be explained, since he had received his legacy, by his desire not to appear to Mette and her family as having money to spare for other things than bare necessities. It is probable that he told Mette of the legacy only considerably later.

Gauguin was for a time, at least, a figure, and he determined to make the most of the moment. He dressed in a way that was well calculated to shock those *imbéciles* who could not understand his latest paintings. He wore a long blue frock coat with buttons of mother-of-pearl over a blue Russian shirt bordered with yellow and green embroidery. His trousers were of putty-coloured cloth. He had a large grey felt hat with a sky-blue ribbon, white gloves and a walking stick, the handle of which he had surmounted with a blister-pearl and carved into the form of a male and a female figure in an intimate embrace. He wore the special Breton sabots that he had carved and decorated himself. The effect even on his best friends was probably different from the one that he had intended and it had to be conceded that he resembled, unwittingly perhaps, a *compère* in a music-hall more closely than anything else.

Having for so long been without the means of living in the way that he preferred and of being able to receive his friends as he wished, when he had moved into his new studio he hastened to make up for lost time. An unending procession of writers and artists came to his at-homes, among whom were Charles Morice and his Symbolists, his friends from Pont-Aven and Le Pouldu, Séguin, Maufra, Daniel de Monfreid,

de Chamaillard and O'Connor when they were in Paris, the sculptors Rodin, Maillol and Francisco Durrio, and poets and playwrights, including August Strindberg and Julien Leclercq.

The house in the rue Vercingétorix had a dilapidated and neglected air. Hidden behind a high wall, and facing a large square yard that was littered with discarded blocks of stone and marble, it consisted of a ground floor and two stories. The studio that Gauguin occupied was one of three on the second floor and was reached by a staircase and a balcony that ran along outside the building. An undernourished tree grew with difficulty among the disorder of the yard.

Inside the small entrance, where Gauguin had covered the glazing with paintings and with a warning in Tahitian, *te faruru*, which informed his visitors that his studio was an abode of love, was a small room to the left that was used as a bedroom. It contained an iron bedstead and a chimney place. Another door, over which hung a curtain of Italian material, led into the studio. Here Gauguin had prepared a decorative scheme, in keeping with his own unusual appearance, that startled visitors coming in from the wintry street on their first visit. The walls were painted yellow-chrome No. 1, and covered with canvases and a collection of lethal weapons in exotic woods, boomerangs, lances, tomahawks and axes that he had brought back from Oceania, or acquired in Paris. Besides his own canvases, were those paintings by Cézanne and Pissarro that remained from his collection and that Emile Schuffenecker and, later, Daniel de Monfreid had looked after for him. He possessed also several paintings by Van Gogh obtained by mutual exchange. Apart from his easels, the furniture in the studio was limited to a Persian carpet, a somewhat shabby sofa from the period of Louis-Philippe, a piano, and a large camera mounted on legs. On the chimney-piece that was never used were displayed a variety of mineralogical specimens and tropical shells. A pet monkey lived among the easels.

Gauguin's chief and most surprising decoration was, however,

his mistress, a half-caste Javanese who opened the door when a feeble tinkle from the hand-bell announced a guest. Her name was Annah and she had come originally to Gauguin as a model. She was small, and when walking with Gauguin, dressed in his new clothes, she made him appear far taller than he was. It is possible that the impression which Gauguin wished to give was more astonishing and prosperous than was the one which was received by the majority of his friends.

This magnificent interlude did not last for very long, but it lasted long enough for a variety of suitably exaggerated rumours to gain circulation. It was reported that Gauguin was to be seen at his evening receptions puffing his pipe and reclining on a sofa elevated above his guests on a platform while they offered him the grossest flattery. Leclercq was reported to improvise adulatory verses that he accompanied, between salaams, on a mandoline. Absinthe, grog and brandy were said to circulate incessantly among the guests who were encouraged to acclaim the great regenerator of painting, until this individual—Gauguin—with a tired but happy smile, would bid them calm themselves. That Gauguin kept a somewhat exotic open house during the winter and spring of 1893–94 is undeniable. How much truth there was in the rumours that gained currency is now difficult to judge. Charles Morice admits to charades in which Gauguin took part "avec une divine maladresse." It is possible but less probable that Gauguin indulged, during this winter, in a leg-pull *en masse*. The period came to an end with the spring and the frittering-away of his legacy, for Annah was fond of clothes and Gauguin had a generous nature.

Before he left Paris, Gauguin saw his former model and mistress, Juliette, for the last time. She was now a dressmaker. She called on him and found him with her successor. After insulting Annah, whom she imagined knew little French, she was astonished to hear the half-caste girl ask her in a calm voice: "Madame, will you soon have finished?" She answered with fury that she regretted having left her dressmaking

scissors behind, but to Gauguin's infinite relief a painful and sanguinary encounter between the two women was avoided.

During 1894 Gauguin made two journeys outside France. The first was in January when he spent six days in Belgium. At Bruges he was profoundly moved by the work of the Flemish painter Memling. The same quality that he found to admire in Cimabue and Giotto drew him to the early Flemings. His admiration came to an end with Rubens, and the entry of Flemish painting into Naturalism. "When one sees Rubens," he told de Monfreid, "everything collapses."

His second journey was to Copenhagen to see Mette and his children. The exact date is as uncertain as is the length of time that he spent with them. If there were little pleasure for him in this meeting with Mette he was at least able to spend a few happy hours with Aline, who was now capable, he knew, of understanding him. He was still unable to offer Mette the primary security that was necessary before she would consider joining him with their children. It was nine years since he had been obliged to leave them all in Copenhagen. His position was now no more fundamentally secure than when he had starved with his son Clovis in Paris. It has been suggested that during this visit he proposed that the whole family should accompany him to Oceania, that they should all make their permanent home there, and that Mette refused to consider the idea on account of the children. If he did so it was the last attempt that he made to achieve reunion with them and he must have known that it would hardly appeal to the bourgeois viewpoint of Mette's Danish family, who respected comfortable security above all else and who could only dismiss this idea of his as a last wild phantasy. He had now to admit defeat and to realise that reunion with his family was never to be achieved.

Chapter Eighteen

BRITTANY AND PARIS FOR THE LAST TIME

Gauguin had done little work in the rue Vercingétorix during the winter and, when a great deal of his money had been spent, he decided to go away with Annah to work at Le Pouldu for some months. He left Paris during the spring, and the at-homes in the yellow studio were ended.

Mademoiselle Henry, however, no longer kept the hotel at Le Pouldu where he had lived with de Haan, and he went instead to stay with a Polish painter of the name of Slevinsky who offered him hospitality in his villa there. At the beginning of the summer he returned to the Pension Gloanec at Pont-Aven where he found some old friends, Séguin, O'Connor and de Chamaillard among them, as well as the dealer Chaudet. Paul Sérusier was there also, but Gauguin was not prepared to continue with their friendship owing to some grievance that he felt towards him. He no longer associated with Emile Bernard after Bernard's claim that Gauguin had taken his ideas from him.

Gauguin's appearance was now a source of perpetual astonishment and irritation to the Breton peasants. He chose to wear an astrakhan hat and waistcoat and was accompanied by his monkey, or, as some accounts have said, a green parrot which he carried on his shoulder. The presence of Annah aroused their scandalised curiosity. One day—probably in July—Gauguin went with Annah and a pet and some friends, among whom was Armand Séguin, to Concarneau, a seaside village near Pont-Aven. Here their appearance, and particularly that of Annah, provoked comments from a group of children, one of whom received a box on the ears from Armand Séguin. The father of the child and a band of sailors intervened and a fight ensued. Gauguin was an expert in the art of French boxing. He had also taken lessons during a previous stay in Brittany in the

newer art of boxing with gloves and he was able to defend himself against the dozen men who attacked them. When the fight was at its height, Séguin decided however to escape by jumping into the harbour and Gauguin was forced to defend himself alone, or at least with the inadequate help of whatever other friends were with them. When most of the men had been driven off, one of them succeeded in approaching Gauguin from behind and in kicking him violently on the ankle with his sabot, shattering the bones. There is disagreement as to whether any action for assault was undertaken. One account calls the lack of subsequent action inexplicable, another declares that Gauguin was awarded damages but that the sailor who had assaulted him sold his boat, the only property he possessed, before the action was settled and subsequently claimed to have no property. In either event, Gauguin received, naturally, nothing.

Gauguin was taken back to Pont-Aven on a stretcher, smoking stoically, while Annah, after displaying an unnatural indifference to his misfortune, found an excuse to catch an early train for Paris where she ransacked the studio in the rue Vercingétorix, robbing Gauguin of everything that she admired and disappearing completely immediately afterwards.

The injury to Gauguin's ankle proved to be so serious that for several weeks he was immobilised and for several months in great pain. The insomnia from which he had all his life suffered was greatly aggravated by his accident. In September however he was well enough to attend Charles Morice, probably as a second, in a duel.

Annah's treachery was an embittering shock to Gauguin and various other disappointments provoked in him a feeling of complete discouragement. His money was being rapidly spent —the cost of treatment for his injury was no less than his expenses when Annah had been with him. He remembered the promise of the Director of the Beaux-Arts, who had granted him his honorary artistic mission before he had left for Tahiti, that on his return the State would purchase a

number of his canvases. When, later, he went to claim the fulfilment of this promise he discovered that the Director who had granted him his mission had gone and that a new man, a Monsieur Roujon, had been appointed.

The new Director was a man of letters, a great admirer of the Academic-Bouguereau tendency in painting. To Gauguin's demand that the previous Director's promise should be honoured, he said: "I will never encourage your art which revolts me and which I do not understand. . . . Have you any document?" Gauguin had no document, and the National Museums of France did not, in consequence, become the possessors of any of his paintings by direct purchase. The only result of this interview was that an extraordinary rumour began to spread which suggested that Gauguin had visited the Ministry of Fine-Arts to solicit the Legion of Honour as a reward for his services to painting.

Gauguin made a last attempt at obtaining something from the French Government. Dressed in his blue frock coat, with his white gloves and unusual cane, he appeared unsuccessfully before the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies to ask for a post as Resident in Oceania, an appointment that once before he had asked Charles Morice to obtain for him.

To cap the misfortunes of this year a prostitute, whom he encountered in the neighbourhood of his studio in the rue Vercingétorix, infected him with syphilis, a taint that retarded the healing of his ankle and proved fatal to him within nine years.

The sum of Gauguin's misfortunes made only one thing appear to him as possible. He was disgusted with Europe, with the gross and materialistic age—the age of gold—that he saw approaching and in which the *imbécile* was to gain complete ascendancy. He feared the fate that the succeeding generation was to suffer as the result of this domination and he was determined to avoid it for himself. He was, finally, completely free. He knew that he could never earn enough to live in Europe and, therefore, that he must renounce his old hope that

it would some day be possible for him to be reunited with his family. His illness—and he was fully aware of its severity—depressed him profoundly. Daniel de Monfreid was told of his decision: "I have made a final resolution, which is to return to Oceania for always. I shall be back in Paris in December for the sole purpose of selling off all my stuff at any price I can get (everything). If I am successful I shall leave at once in February. Then I shall be able to end my days freely and peacefully without bothering about to-morrow and without this eternal struggle with the *imbéciles.*" He seems at this time to have forgotten the financial worries of his first visit to Tahiti or perhaps such worries seemed to him now to be easier to bear in Oceania than in France.

Gauguin returned to Paris from Pont-Aven before Christmas and began his preparations for leaving. He lived alone in the studio in the rue Vercingétorix, in bad health. Occasional friends came to see him, but the parties of the past were not renewed.

The sale that was to finance his voyage was to take place in the middle of February at the Hôtel Drouot. Forty-nine canvases were to be put up for auction, as well as a number of drawings and prints. Two-thirds of the pictures were those that had already figured in his Exhibition at Durand-Ruel's. Gauguin asked August Strindberg, who had been a frequent visitor to the rue Vercingétorix, to write a preface to the catalogue. The Swedish playwright refused and wrote Gauguin a letter explaining his reasons. "I cannot understand your art and I cannot like it. (I have no grip on your art, this time exclusively Tahitian.) But I know that this confession will neither astonish nor wound you, for you seem above all to be strengthened by the hatred of others; your personality delights in the antipathy that it arouses. I have myself made serious efforts to class you, to introduce you as a link in the chain, to bring myself to an understanding of the history of your development—but in vain. I have seen on the walls of your studio a hubbub of sun-filled pictures that pursued me at

night in my dreams. I have seen trees that no botanist would find, animals that Cuvier could never have imagined and people that you alone have been able to create, a sea that must have flowed from a volcano, a sky in which no God could live. Monsieur, I said in my dream, you have created a new earth and a new heaven, but I am not happy in the midst of your creations. They are too sunlit for me, who like chiaroscuro. And in your paradise lives an Eve who is not my ideal. . . . What is Gauguin then? He is the savage who hates an interfering civilisation, something of a Titan who, jealous of the Creator, in his spare time invents his own little people, the child who takes his toys to pieces in order to make others out of them, one who denies and defies, preferring to call the sky red than to call it blue with the rest of us. *Bon voyage, Maître;* only, come back to find me. I shall then, perhaps, have learned to understand your art better, which will permit me to write a real preface to a new catalogue in a new Hôtel Drouot, for I also am beginning to feel the immense need of becoming a savage and of creating a new world."

Gauguin did not take the letter amiss; he was delighted. Strindberg had put his intentions into words succinctly for him. "I have to-day received your letter," he replied, "which *is* a preface to my catalogue. I had the idea of asking you for this preface when I saw you the other day in my studio playing the guitar and singing; your northern blue eyes were looking attentively at the pictures hanging on the walls. I had a presentiment of rebellion, of a clash between your civilisation and my barbarism, a civilisation that makes you suffer, a barbarism that rejuvenates me. The Eve whom I paint (she alone) may logically remain nude before one's eyes. Yours, in this simple state, could not walk without immodesty, and (perhaps) too beautiful, would evoke evil. It remains for me, *cher* Strindberg, to thank you."

Gauguin printed Strindberg's letter and his reply in the place of a preface. The sale reached a total of about fifteen thousand francs but this comparatively large figure included

many canvases that Gauguin himself bought in, disgusted with the prices that they reached.

The highest price paid was nine hundred francs for the canvas named "*Manao Tupapau*"—"The Spirit of the Dead Watches"—that Gauguin had once described so fully in a letter to Mette and for which he had hoped to receive not less than two thousand francs. Most of his friends, Séguin, Slevinsky, O'Connor, Maufra and Schuffenecker bought canvases—the latter acquiring five. Degas bought two, including the copy of Manet's "Olympia."

Gauguin was now free to leave France as he had planned, but he was to do so alone. When he had been in Brittany in the previous summer he had arranged to travel with an Englishman and a Frenchman who were to stay in Tahiti for two or three years, but when the time came they apparently found reasons, like de Haan and Bernard before them, for staying behind.

A celebrated picture dealer approached Gauguin, shortly before he left, with a contract offering him a reasonable but irrevocably fixed price for his canvases. Gauguin's income would have increased only in proportion to his output, not to his renown. He refused. When later it was known that he was in desperate need of money, many of his friends absolved themselves from helping him by remembering his refusal of this offer.

Before leaving he wrote once again to Mette, but he did not tell her of what he had planned, or even that he intended leaving France again. "Let us chat a little, now. One must admit that since my return to Paris any man in my place would have had sad reflections to make on life, his family, and everything else.

"1st. You write: 'You must get along by yourself.'

"2nd. The children write: Nothing.

"3rd. I have my ankle broken which ruins my health; from my wife, not one word.

"4th. The winter has been terribly long and I have been

alone in my studio unsuccessfully doctoring my throat. I cannot live without sun. At the age of forty-seven, I do not wish to fall into misery again, and yet I am near to doing so. Once I am down, no one will help me up."

There is no proof that Gauguin had tried to persuade Mette to go with him to Oceania. There is only the tradition. If he had done so he did not continue to the last with the hopeless task.

Having made up his mind never to return, he liquidated everything. After the sale he distributed those things that he did not wish to take with him to Tahiti as souvenirs among his friends. With Daniel de Monfreid he deposited certain unsold canvases and appointed him his business representative in France. He did not send anything to Mette, for he considered that he had given her as much of his property and money as he had been able. When he had been obliged to leave her in Copenhagen in 1885, he had made over to her all the furniture that he had taken to Denmark from their Paris apartment, as well as a number of his own canvases and sculptures. His brother-in-law had bought the greater part of his collection of paintings for fifteen thousand francs and this sum he had left in Mette's hands. From time to time during the ten years that had passed since then he had sent her more of his canvases as well as a number of ceramics. These she had sold as she could and had retained the proceeds. In cash he had given her four thousand francs. Without the money, he estimated that she had had thirty thousand francs worth of property. He considered that he had done his best and that it was enough.

He probably left at the end of February or in March as soon as he had received the money from the sale. All details lack. He did not describe this last voyage to anyone, for it was very different from the first; it was in no way a voyage of discovery. It was his third and last escape from France and, he hoped, from poverty and the all-embracing and insupportable imbecile mentality that was leading Europe he dared not imagine where.

PART IV

"Vous connaissez . . . ce que j'ai voulu établir: *le droit* de tout oser."

PAUL GAUGUIN
to Georges-Daniel de Monfreid.

Chapter Nineteen

THE THIRD ESCAPE: TAHITI AGAIN

On his arrival in Tahiti, which may have been as late as August, although if this were so it is difficult to imagine how he spent so long on the voyage, Gauguin stayed in Papeete for a short time while he looked for a new home. He decided this time to build himself a hut, so that he would have exactly the accommodation he needed. At Punavia, near the end of the Punaru Valley, he found a site on the seashore that pleased him and that he succeeded in renting from the owner, an unpractical arrangement that he was soon to regret. Punavia was less than half the distance from Papeete to Mataiéa, but the situation was almost more beautiful. Here the soil was very fertile, and the vegetation the richest on the island.

By November the large Tahitian hut was already built. It stood near the road, surrounded by flowering shrubs, but was in the shadow of a number of large trees. In front lay the island of Moorea while from behind a magnificent view of the great mountains of the island could be seen, rising above the central plateau that he had once explored.

Gauguin had brought with him a number of things from the rue Vercingétorix which he used to furnish his hut. "Imagine," he wrote to the faithful Daniel, "a large bamboo birdcage with a roof thatched with coco-nut leaves, divided into two parts by the curtains of my old studio. One of the two parts forms a bedroom with very little light in order to keep it cool. The other part has a large high window and forms the studio. On the ground, mats and my old Persian carpet: the whole decorated with stuffs, bibelots and drawings." He decorated the smaller glass panes in the hut with designs in oil, and carved two coco-nut tree-trunks in the form of Polynesian gods and erected them outside the entrance. A smaller hut served as a stable for his horse and cart.

Tehura had married someone else during his absence, but she came as a truant to stay in the new hut with him for a week. At the end of this time she was obliged to leave him again. A succession of young women then came to live with Gauguin, staying a night or longer. Sometimes two or three came together. This distracting life made him wish to settle down again and find another *vahiné*, an adequate successor to Tehura.

Gauguin's hut had cost him a great deal of money and, when he had completed it, there remained only nine hundred francs out of the sum that he had brought with him. He could not have arrived with a great sum of money, since a large proportion of the fifteen thousand francs derived from the sale had consisted of canvases bought in by him, and he had had to pay the inevitable debts before leaving as well as his fare to Oceania. In the erection of his hut he knew that he had been extravagant, but it was his nature. "As always, when I have money in my pocket and prospects, I spend without counting, trusting in the future and in my talent, then I soon arrive at the end of my resources." This time his improvidence was not so culpable. He had left France a creditor for 4,300 francs, of which the greater part was due to him from an art dealer of the name of Lévy who had been acting as one of his principal agents. The rest was owing by personal friends. He had trusted his debtors to send the money after him. As before, however, he received no money, no letters of explanation. "And to think that there are men of a certain age who act with the greatest thoughtlessness and that the life of an honest man depends upon it. I am speaking of Lévy. Without him I would not have dared to leave for Tahiti, but it was he who came to me to propose the following idea: 'You can set out without worry; we shall not leave you in the lurch. It is perhaps a question of a little time, for your work is not easy to get people to swallow, but I shall do what is necessary.' And already he does not want to have anything more to do with it. I therefore left confidently, not making false calculations. . . . I am very much afraid that Lévy,

who is a very self-satisfied man, has been stupidly annoyed by someone and that he has replied by chucking everything up!"

After having had such unfortunate experiences over money when he lived at Mataiéa, and even as near Paris as Brittany, Gauguin might, without undue misanthropy, have learned not to trust so many of the people who acted for him in business matters or who simply owed him money, but his optimism, his patience, his natural charitableness and improvidence spared him any undue cynicism and preserved his almost childlike belief in the promises of his friends. He was unfailingly and aggravatingly incapable of any but an ultimately charitable explanation of a default of which he was the victim. Any cynicism that Gauguin may have had was reserved for his comments on marriage, "that stupid institution." In spite of the traditional violence of his opinions, he invariably employed gentle epithets to indicate his disgust, even when reproaching himself. "Ah yes, I am a great criminal," he wrote on one occasion without conviction. "What does it matter! So was Michaelangelo, and I am not Michaelangelo."

Gauguin's health became steadily worse during the first year after his arrival. His broken ankle failed to heal and at night caused him continuous pain, which robbed him of the little sleep that his insomnia might otherwise have permitted him. His character began to undergo a change as the disease from which he suffered now progressed. He underwent occasional bouts of self-pity, while money became more than before his principal preoccupation. He painted with considerable energy, nevertheless, throughout this time, and his belief in himself grew rather than left him. This increase of confidence in himself, which later was to make him hypercritical and interfering when brought into contact with various actions of the Colonial Government, was possibly a pathological symptom of his disease, but at no time was he grossly arrogant in his attitude. "Perhaps I have no talent but (all vanity aside) I believe, however, that one does not begin a movement in art,

however small it may be, without possessing a little, or there must be a great many fools in the world."

To this period belongs a painting which he named "*Te arii vahiné*," and which he believed to be among his more successfully realised pictures. "I have. . ." he told de Monfreid, "done a canvas, 1m.30 by 1m., which I consider still better than anything I have done yet: a naked woman is lying on a green carpet, a servant is gathering fruit, two old men by a large tree are discussing the tree of Knowledge; in the background the seashore . . . I think that as far as the colour is concerned I have never done anything with so great and deep a sonority. The trees are in flower, a dog is watching, two doves on the right are cooing. But what is the use of sending home this canvas when there are so many others that cannot be sold and that cause such a fuss. This one would cause an even greater fuss. I am condemned to die of goodwill in order that I shall not die of hunger."

When Gauguin had been about a year in Punavia he was forced to borrow money in order to be able to buy food, and to ask de Monfreid to try to beg someone in Paris to lend him a thousand francs against the security of some new canvases. He needed only a hundred francs a month for himself and for his *vahiné*, and he allowed a further ten francs for his tobacco, for soap, and for clothing for the girl. Tehura's unfortunate successor was thirteen and a half years old. Her name has not been preserved.

From various sources in Denmark he received news of Mette and his children, and he learned that they were far from being without resources. Mette was happy in a life that suited her, liked and helped by all her friends. He had sent her some new paintings, either before or since leaving France, which she was entitled to sell. Gauguin felt a minor satisfaction in knowing that those she sold were better placed with Danish collectors than were other unsold canvases of his which remained stored in the inner rooms of picture-dealers' galleries in Paris.

The life that Gauguin led at Punavia was quiet and almost completely uneventful. His health demanded this. He had no distractions beyond attending to the garden round his hut and playing his guitar. For long periods during the day he was obliged to lie on his bed to relieve the strain on his broken ankle and during these hours his mind revolved perpetually round the problem of how he was to secure the very small monthly sum of from four to five pounds that he required for his essential expenses. He evolved a plan that was not in principle unlike the idea which he had once had for financing a group of painters and which he had suggested to Theo and Vincent Van Gogh. He wished to find fifteen people who understood his painting or who might "hope to see a profit," and to arrange that each should send him one hundred and sixty francs a year in exchange for one good canvas each. For the rest of his work he determined to keep to a minimum price of four hundred francs. In this way he would be assured of a regular income of two hundred francs a month, to be paid quarterly so that each participant would only have to find forty francs at any one given time. The fifteen canvases were to be sent in advance each year, the fifteen for the first year could be taken from those held by Lévy, and the fifteen benefactors would draw lots between them for the order in which they were to make their choice. Among the first nine people whom he hoped would agree were two picture dealers, a journalist, a sculptor, three fellow artists, and two collectors. One, the Comte de la Rochefoucauld, had formerly granted two of Gauguin's friends a yearly allowance. He also told his friend Maufra of the scheme and solicited his help. He hoped that Schuffenecker would take the remaining six parts. "I am certain that at this price my canvases are not expensive and that in time to come the owners will not lose. . . . It is an honourable proposition for everyone; it is the means of helping an artist in whom one has confidence without giving him charity. God knows, I am not asking much. To earn two hundred francs a month (*less* than a workman) when I am

nearly fifty, with a quite good reputation . . . If I have resigned myself to live *in poverty* it is because I only wish to serve Art."

The plan came to nothing. The reason for this is not definite, but not difficult to imagine. De Monfreid, who was to sponsor it, was away from Paris when he received the letter containing it. If any of those whom Gauguin had suggested were approached, too many probably found reasons for refusing, remembering that Gauguin had rejected the contract offered by a Paris picture dealer that would have brought him in a regular monthly income and obviated the necessity for this latest scheme. That they did not choose to understand his reason for having refused did not make them more anxious or likely now to help.

Gauguin determined at the same time to oblige Mette in future to send him a third of any money that she obtained through sales of his paintings in Denmark. Until this year, she had always kept all the money that she received. As he doubted that she would do so if he asked her, he now told de Monfreid, who supplied her with canvases as she needed them, that it was his "irrevocable order" that she would only receive his work when she had paid in advance a third of the price of four hundred francs per canvas.

Gauguin's nature was becoming hardened with the aggravation and with the continuance of his sufferings. The condition of his ankle was now complicated by eczema and a form of erysipelas that was shortly also to affect his other leg. He was able to forget his physical and financial worries when he worked but when he was unable to do so owing to pain, and when he did not have enough money for food, he only had his multiple and melancholy ruminations to occupy his mind. He read little, for he needed all the remaining strength of his eyes for his work. In the hot and damp climate of Polynesia, where wounds healed with difficulty, there was little hope that the injury to his ankle, complicated with his affection of the blood, would be cured. He must have known that the chances of his

final recovery were slight and that he would suffer increasingly as the years went by, but he stayed where he was. The presence of sun, of pure colour, and of a race that he loved, were essential to the fundamental happiness of his life. Others might find all they wished for their art in the Butte Montmartre, but Gauguin needed another set of values and he had gone to them as they could not come to him.

During the summer of this year, 1896, Charles Morice went to see Monsieur Roujon, of the Beaux-Arts, in an attempt to persuade him finally to honour his predecessor's promise and to buy some of Gauguin's work for the French State. Roujon, with unusual bureaucratic alacrity, replied that as long as he held the position that he did, the State would neither buy nor commission a square centimetre of canvas from him. He promised, however, to do something for Gauguin. In due course he sent him an official grant of two hundred francs (£8), "*à titre d'encouragement.*" This, however, merely served to prove that his refusal was sponsored by personal animus alone, for it was not in the nature of the French or of their institutions to arrange to donate money to any individual unless the talent of the recipient had been long or generally recognised.

Gauguin considered that the State was his debtor and he was not encouraged in the least by the sum that was sent to him. He returned the money to Monsieur Roujon, although in his penniless condition it must have been hard for him to do so. In this manner Gauguin ended his dealings with the French State. Reflecting on this event over three years later, Gauguin remarked gaily enough to de Monfreid: "You don't know some anarchist or other capable of dynamiting Roujon the Director of the Beaux-Arts: if you do, keep quiet, for his replacement by Geffroy, for example, would perhaps improve my position—for example, a big order for designs for stained glass would give me much pleasure to do and besides something to eat. . . ." Monsieur Roujon continued to direct the fortunes of the Beaux-Arts, however, until the year of Gauguin's death, when, for other reasons, he resigned. If his successor had then

wished to buy for the State it was too late, for the corner in Gauguin's canvases that had accumulated in Paris was already being managed, and prices for his work were beginning to rise above those that the State could afford.

Mette and Gauguin wrote less frequently to each other. Their last meeting had left him with a certain inevitable bitterness and her refusal to consider the journey with him and their children to Oceania had made him lose his failing interest in them. Only his daughter remained with him in his mind as a person who had understood him and who, as she grew older, might continue to understand him better. Of his three surviving sons he makes no mention.

Mette had not been told of Gauguin's decision to leave Europe for always, nor of his departure until he had gone. It is probable that she heard the news through friends. If she had refused to go with him Gauguin probably considered himself absolved from any obligation to inform her further of his intentions. But Mette felt aggrieved and wrote to him to tell him so, in more than one letter. Gauguin found her complaining and her recriminations intolerable, and he replied with a letter that for the moment put an end to their correspondence. "If," he told her, "you must write to me in future letters like those since my arrival, I ask you to stop. My work is not finished and I must live: consider that and cease this perpetual complaining which does you no good and which harms me a great deal. I could reply to you (if only you had, apart from your children, a heart that would understand). . . ." Mette wrote to him one more letter only, in the following year.

Charles Morice could not have made his request to Monsieur Roujon at a time when a favourable result and a substantial order would have been of greater use. Gauguin had been obliged to go to the hospital at Papeete in July, being unable longer to bear his suffering without proper treatment. He intended to stay a month, and hoped to be "cured" at the end of that time. De Monfreid and Schuffenecker had both written by the previous mail to announce the arrival of money,

so that he knew, at least, that he would be able to pay the bill. His friend Maufra had also written promising to repay his debt in the following month. Gauguin imagined that he could look forward to a few months of financial tranquillity.

Before entering the hospital Gauguin sent to France a first parcel of his new canvases which an officer undertook to forward to de Monfreid's Paris studio. It was inevitable that they would arrive with freight to pay. De Monfreid was to be away in the Midi when they came and the danger existed that the Paris concierge might refuse the parcel. It was a doubt and a worry which Gauguin was forced to face until he had heard of their arrival and which his health did not make easier for him to bear. Added to this, he was haunted by the feeling that he had sent them to the wrong number in the street. The next month he returned to Punavia, no longer in pain, but in a condition of extreme weakness. He was obliged, to his shame, to tell the hospital that he would only later be able to pay their bill of one hundred and forty francs, for none of the promised money had come.

He had been a year in Tahiti, but none of his debtors had sent him a centime of their debts. "Admit that that is enough to make the strongest man despair; the more so when he is very tried by a cruel illness." For the rest of the month, in spite of his condition, he and his *vahiné* were obliged to exist principally on water and boiled rice. He could only reflect during this time that without doubt he had been born under an evil star.

Schuffenecker pursued him with his mournful and unstable letters. His character did not allow him to leave Gauguin in peace and he mixed reproach with jealous gibes and piteous self-disparagement. Gauguin needed all his patience to read these letters and not to reply. He further exasperated Gauguin by telling him that he was hard in his attitude towards Mette and that de Monfreid, whose matrimonial tangle had provoked great sympathy from Gauguin, was equally hard towards his wife. At the same time he recounted his own wife's faults. "One can see," Gauguin remarked, "the straw

in one's wife's eye but not the beam in that of one's neighbour's wife."

More signs of Schuffenecker's activities arrived by the following month's mail. Two sums of two hundred francs, that he had "procured" for Gauguin, one anonymous and one from the Comte de la Rochefoucauld, arrived unexpectedly. Gauguin logically considered that, instead of forwarding the money simply under the label of charity, it would have been less embarrassing to everyone concerned if canvases of his had been taken in exchange. Gauguin spent three hundred francs of this money in reducing his debts, which stood now at a thousand francs, and with the remaining hundred he hoped to be able to live "for several months." De Monfreid, meanwhile, wrote tantalisingly to say that if Gauguin were in absolute need of money a certain rich amateur was prepared to give a thousand francs for an important but unspecified painting. Gauguin was in despair at his friend's incomprehension of his position. "Do you not then know that I am in need of money, do my letters tell the contrary? In any case, if it were a question of a firm offer, for a thousand francs one ought to give two or three pictures, since immediate necessity now prevents me from quoting them at any price. When will this martyrdom cease? . . . I am so demoralised, discouraged, that I do not think that greater misfortunes can come my way . . . forgive me for writing so little; but I am so tired, my head is so empty, and the inaction that my foot forces on me has made me so lazy . . . !"

Gauguin's health improved during the last months of the year while his financial worries continued as acute as before. It was only this improvement in his health that allowed him to continue living. If he had had a relapse he would probably have tried to kill himself sooner than he did. He had said that he believed that greater misfortunes would not come his way and for the moment they did not. He worked with enormous energy from six in the morning until midday. He produced also many pieces of sculpture, nudes, or animals such as

lions that were unknown to his neighbours and that they found astonishing. These he kept scattered about in his garden.

One of these sculptures, the nude torso of a woman, brought him into his first conflict with the missionaries in the island. The *pasteur* of his district endeavoured to force Gauguin to remove the figure from view, and he applied to the local magistrate for an order. But the law laughed and Gauguin did not spare his words. He seemed also to obtain a certain exhilaration from the prospect of being once again a father, for his young *vahiné* was expecting a child at about the turn of the year.

The New Year began with a relapse in his health but with the arrival of a substantial sum of money, the equivalent of forty-eight pounds, from the dealer Chaudet, and the promise of a further sixty. The news also came that de Monfreid had received the parcel of canvases, over which Gauguin had worried so much, and that he had shown the paintings in Paris, an arrangement that seemed to have upset Chaudet considerably.

Gauguin at once paid his debts. He could see before him six or eight months that would be free of worry and he considered returning to the hospital "to be cured again." Before doing so, he sent to Paris a large order for fifty assorted brushes and over eighty tubes of colour. His principal order was for white, carmine, ultramarine and yellow ochre, with smaller orders for cobalt, red madder, cadmium yellow. emerald, and vermilion. He repeated his request for guitar strings by the metre and asked for strings for his mandoline, metal bridges for his guitar, and packets of red and yellow gilding powder. Necessities, all of them, even if the total cost were to be high. He also ordered a pair of high-laced boots, for he had found that his injured ankle needed special support. "I want Russian leather, as soft as possible, not lined . . . practically clowns' *brodequins*, laced almost from the beginning. The soles to protrude exaggeratedly and the toe well squared . . . with them the largest sized bottle of red polish. You will arrange for the price and the payment . . ."

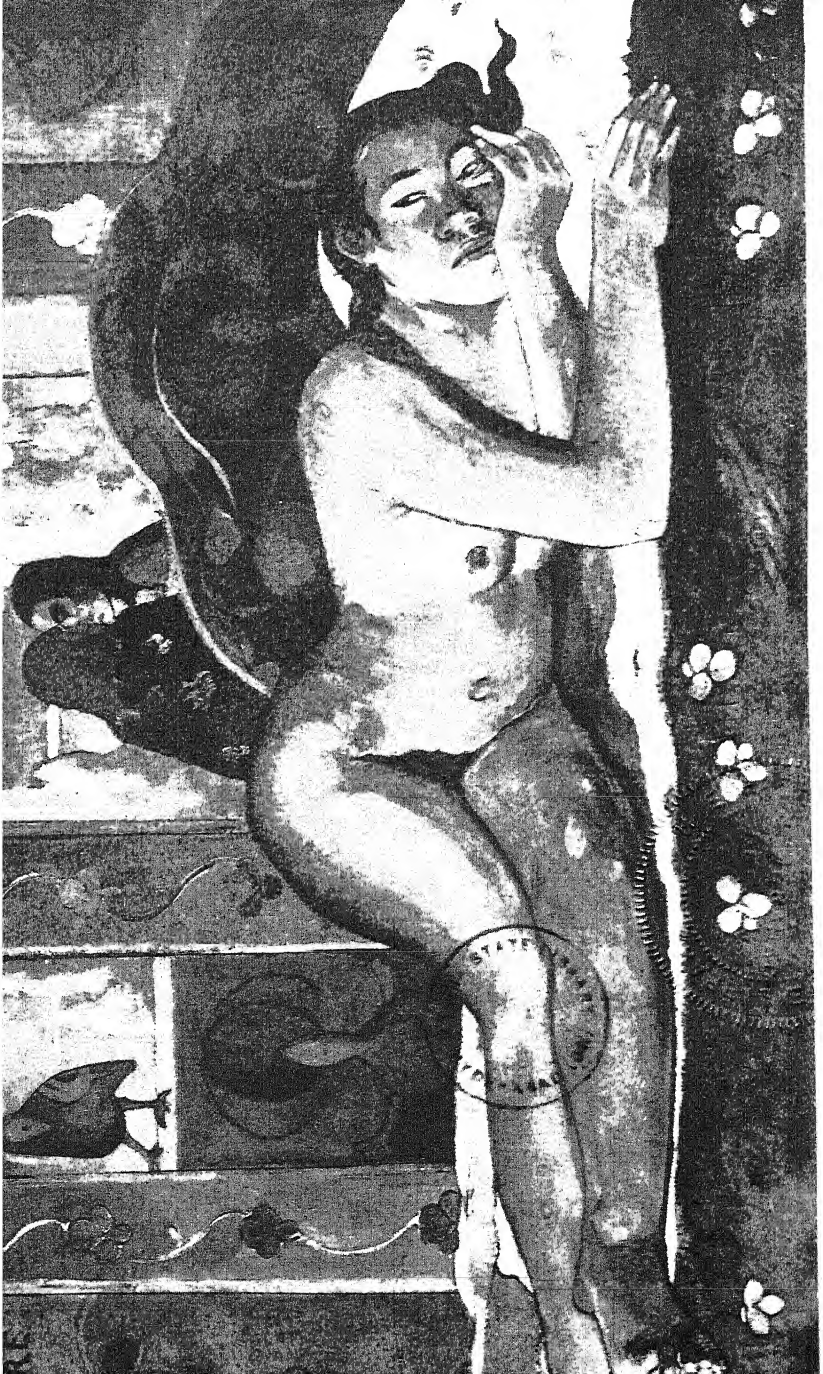
He encountered only insults from the officials when he tried to obtain admittance to the hospital, and after finally arranging to pay five francs (4*s.*) a day while he remained there, they capped the matter by issuing him with a card for an *indigent*, imagining that he would be willing to enter a ward with "soldiers and servants." This he refused to do and the conviction among the Europeans of Papeete grew, as it had done in Europe, that he was a rebel against all authority. Although he had a little money at this moment, he does not seem to have been willing, after this, to try to make other terms with the hospital. He returned instead to Punavia to paint. By the middle of February he had six or seven more canvases to send to Daniel, including a self-portrait that he inscribed to his friend, and the canvas of a nude Kanaka girl to which he gave the name of "Nevermore." ". . . I do not know if I am mistaken but I think that it is good. I wanted to suggest by means of a simple nude a certain long-lost and barbarian luxury. The whole is drowned in colours that are purposely sombre and sad; it is neither the silk, nor the velvet, nor the cambric, nor the gold that makes this luxury, but simply matter that has become enriched by the hand of the artist. . . . As a title, 'Nevermore'; it is not by any means the raven of Edgar Poe, but the bird of the devil, that is watching. It is badly painted (I am so nervy and I work in fits and starts), no matter, I think it is a good canvas—a naval officer will send them all to you within a month, I hope." This naval officer, owing to Gauguin's absence in hospital, rolled the canvases himself with unfortunate results.

In April Gauguin received his last letter from Mette. It was short and unexpected and merely told him that their daughter Aline had died from pneumonia after a few days' illness. When he first read the letter Gauguin felt little emotion. He was so used to suffering himself that it did not make a greater impression on him than another less tragic piece of news would have done. But as time went by he began to understand that he had lost the only one of his children whom

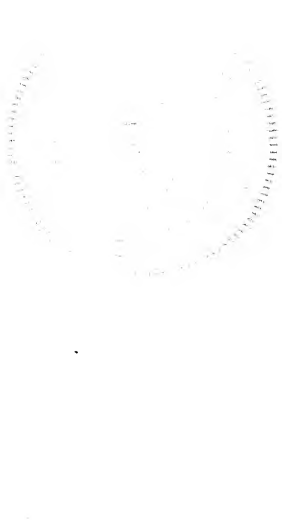


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NEVERMORE



he felt would have understood him and who had as yet any pride in him. Mette had announced Aline's death as barely as possible, and, coming after so long a silence, the letter seemed to him to be the more brutal for its shortness.

Gauguin wrote twice to Mette. The first letter was the product of his grief, the second, of his embittered reflections. Mette destroyed this second letter and never wrote to him again. She considered that he had been unjust and cruel and she was not able to realise that the letter was the product of despair, written by an ill man. It could not have been typical of Gauguin's mind or character and Mette undoubtedly did her husband a great service in destroying it. But the first letter showed the true side of Gauguin's affection. He said of Aline: "Her grave is there with you, with its flowers. That is but an illusion. Her tomb is here, beside me—and my tears form flowers, living flowers."

Following the news of Aline's death came the news of the death of the owner of the land on which he had built his hut and the land itself was sold. Gauguin found himself obliged at a moment's notice to demolish his hut and to look for another site on which to reconstruct it. After a great deal of bargaining he was able to borrow for one year one thousand francs from the *Caisse Agricole,* at that time the only business house in Tahiti that gave credits, and to buy, for seven hundred francs, a plot of land within a hundred yards of his old home. The plot was larger than he wished for or required, but it was the only one for sale. With the remaining three hundred francs he arranged to rebuild his hut. The land, however, promised to be a good investment, for it carried a hundred coco-nut palms that he was told should bring in five hundred francs (£20) a year and it was also suitable for the growing of vanilla.

Gauguin quickly set about building a large double hut on his new land, one half to serve as his studio, the other as living quarters for himself and his *vahiné.* The length over all was twenty metres and the depth eight metres. He decided to decorate the exterior with sculptures as he had done before,

and to lay out and plant a small garden. The whole property he enclosed with a wire fence. He was convinced that he had acted wisely, and this proved to be true within a very few years.

Chaudet, now his principal dealer, only wrote to him when he had money to send and did not always send money when he had announced it, but for the moment, in spite of the extra expenses of his moving and installation, he was not unduly worried about his finances. Chaudet had begun to sell his work successfully and had sent several large sums and had promised a further eight hundred francs, the proceeds of two paintings by Van Gogh that he had managed to sell for him.

The debts that he had left behind were being slowly liquidated also. His largest debtor, who owed one thousand two hundred and fifty francs, agreed to give Chaudet one hundred and fifty francs a month, while another, who owed him six hundred, was forced to pay. His friend Maufra, however, still maintained that he had sent Gauguin the money which he had owed him. "C'est faux," Gaugiun declared firmly. There remained only one other private debt of eight hundred francs, but no one could tell yet if it were bad or not.

At this time also, M. Ambroise Vollard, who later was to succeed Chaudet as Gauguin's principal dealer, wrote asking for drawings and sculpture to cast in bronze. Gauguin replied ironically that there was a stock of such work in Paris already, not that it had as yet been of any profit to him. To Chaudet he no longer dared to write, for fear of angering him.

May was a calmer month. Gauguin worked a little—for he had no more pain—as a relaxation from supervising the building of the double hut. Chaudet kept up his silence and no further money came and nothing from the sales of his Van Goghs. The monthly mail-day became more than ever the pivot of each month. There was usually only enough time to receive letters and to reply to them before the ship left again. If the letters which Gauguin wrote during these years contain a seemingly chronic chant on the subject of money

and if they appear to be largely a collection of disappointed cries and reiterated statements of his fluctuating health, it cannot be forgotten that they were always written in the hurry of the moment before the mail-boat left the island again, when more often than not his mail had been a disappointment which the realisation of the great distance of Tahiti from France could only aggravate. If letters from France took only ten or eleven weeks to reach him he was delighted. For the end of the year a new service of steamers via America had been promised that would shorten the time for mails by three weeks or more. Gauguin could not help feeling the irony of this, now that so few letters came for him and that his ties with Europe were so few. But when the time came the promised service did not materialise and all was as before.

In July his health broke down again and there began a period of months which were to prove so discouraging that he began to contemplate ending his life. He had no money whatever. The second large sum promised by Chaudet proved to be little over forty pounds, instead of sixty pounds, when it arrived in February. Gauguin's remaining debts had taken it all. Chaudet sent nothing after February, not even the one hundred and fifty francs that Gauguin's chief debtor was supposed to pay him every month. Gauguin was obliged once more to subsist on boiled rice and water. His credit for bread in the Chinese stores was exhausted. He had frequent fainting fits and attacks of fever. The pain from his feet became so acute that he was obliged to spend most of each day lying down or sitting in his chair. He was no longer able to go to the mountains in search of wild bananas and other fruits to supplement his food. The various things that he had asked de Monfreid to buy for him, his guitar strings and the brushes and colours, had arrived, but he was unable to get them from the customs owing to his inability to pay the twelve francs duty that was demanded. The special laced boots that de Monfreid had had made for him in Paris were allowed through without

duty. Although exactly what he had wanted, he could not now use them.

Schuffenecker wrote and regaled him with further aggravating comments. He complained of the *cowardice* exhibited by his friends for his own painting and dwelled on the chagrin that Mette must be enduring and the bothers and difficulties of his own married life. It was a bitter reflection that the only other person besides de Monfreid who wrote in the least frequently to him should have been one who combined all the qualities of a Nosy-Parker with those of a Jeremiah.

Gauguin's mind became progressively and acutely affected by his sufferings and worries. Chaudet, he was forced to conclude, seemed to have abandoned him and to have ceased representing him. "Then, without a dealer, without anyone who can obtain me an annual pittance, what is to become of me? I can see nothing but Death that delivers us from everything. I owe this month one thousand eight hundred francs and have no more credit. It is true that I am a creditor in Paris for two thousand five hundred francs, plus my paintings, plus my collection, plus a balance with Vollard (I believe), plus one thousand four hundred francs from Morice, according to Chaudet's accounts in a letter of six months ago. But since no one will pay me, I have only debts, and in the future for food: O——

"What a mad but sad and wretched adventure this voyage of mine to Tahiti."

De Monfreid's monthly letters were the only regular support that Gauguin received during this disastrous year of 1897. By October the idea of death had taken a firm hold of him. He had been unable to touch his paint brushes for three months. Chaudet's last letter to him had been written over a year before in September 1896 and he knew that the dealer should already have received the whole of the large debt that he had arranged to collect for him.

He warned Daniel that his October letter would probably be "about the last" that he would write him. "If I receive nothing by the end of October, I shall have to make up my

mind, only it would have been better if I had been told two years ago what was up; it would have spared me two years of terrible physical and moral suffering. Whatever happens I do not wish to have a grudge against anyone—one will not say that I have lacked patience, energy. The material proofs are there; *I cannot* earn even a miserable living with *this* painting, above all when I am absent from France. . . . For three months I have not touched a brush, the colours which you sent me will henceforward be useless and no one here will exchange them for ten sous of bread; that is a bitter derision. I can remember these words of Lévy *in agreement with Chaudet*: 'Since you wish to return to Tahiti, here is an arrangement that would fix everything'—and when both sides had signed this contract which you know, they both added: 'You can be certain that whatever happens, you will not need food.' I desire that in France there should be *silence* and above all that Monsieur Schuffenecker should not cry everywhere 'Poor Madame Gauguin!' And since my pictures are unsaleable may they remain unsaleable. And the time will come when people will think that I am a myth or rather an invention of the press; they will ask where are his pictures? The truth is that there are not fifty in collections in France." Unfortunately the agreement with Lévy had been signed only in his imagination.

Throughout all the months of suffering Gauguin did not speak again of his *vahiné* nor of the child that he had said she was to have borne to him at about the turn of the year, beyond saying that she sometimes fetched food for him. No doubt she looked after the hut and cooked the rice and any extra food which she could find. She was still not much more than fourteen years old and can have understood little of the many complications and worries that made up Gauguin's thoughts and life or of the resolution which he had taken that he must end his own life before Nature had had the time to do so. The dark ruminations that he imparted to Daniel were not to be allowed to affect his efforts to round up money and debtors in Paris. ". . . you must act in Paris as if nothing

were wrong and let me know (mail by mail) what news there is from Chaudet."

The action that he had decided to take at the end of October was however postponed for a time by the arrival of a small sum of money, the equivalent of about five pounds, that de Monfreid's wife, Annette, sent to him. He determined for the moment to let Nature have her way, even if the process were to be longer for him. Whenever he encountered a new disappointment or whenever a new worry were added to the rest, he suffered from a vomiting of blood that proved a considerable strain on his heart. He believed that if he had a little patience, and waited, he would be able to die without the reproaches of the world. The only question that still exercised him was when that would be.

"I think," he told de Monfreid, "that everything that ought and that ought not to have been said about me has been said. I only wish for *silence, silence* and again silence. May I be allowed to die in peace, *forgotten*, and if I have got to live, may I be allowed even more peace and to be even more forgotten. What does it matter if I am a pupil of Bernard or of Sérusier! If I have done some good work, nothing will tarnish it; and if I have done muck, why gild it, and deceive people over the quality of the stuff. In any case, society will never be able to reproach me for having taken much money from its pocket by means of lies. If I added up the number of canvases that have found buyers, the number of *canvases* that I have *given* would be larger than the number sold. Not that I regret this, on the contrary; if I had an income of only three thousand francs a year in Tahiti, I would give them all away. All that is simply to say that I have hardly exploited society. . . . One never knows what might happen. If I die suddenly I pray you to keep as a remembrance of me all the canvases *deposited with you; my family will always have too many.*"

The November mail had brought him two other letters from France besides the letter and money from Annette. Schuffenecker had written again and succeeded again in exasperating

Gauguin still further with his provocative comments, hopes and whinings. He trusted, he said, that Gauguin enjoyed permanent good health and that he had by this time long been without financial worries. His own life, he moaned, was miserable and so denuded of friendship on the part of his friends. Gauguin could only wish that the State would present him with the Legion of Honour, for it would cost so little and give Schuffenecker such "*joye.*"

The other letter came from Charles Morice to announce at last the publication, in serial form, of *Noa-Noa*, a book of descriptions and impressions of Tahiti which he had written at odd times during his first visit to the island and in which he had asked Morice to collaborate by interposing poems. It was appearing in the *Revue Blanche*. He had revised it when he had lived in the rue Vercingétorix, and when he had left France again he had given the work of finding a publisher to Charles Morice. When Morice wrote he made no mention, however, of what payment was being made and of how much he had received. Gauguin consequently charged de Monfreid with the awkward and not altogether proper task of asking the editor of the magazine to pay all proceeds to Gauguin alone, and nothing to Morice, until an agreement between Morice and himself had been drawn up. The following month he received a copy of the magazine with the first instalment, "but naturally no cash. . . ." He knew that articles were paid for at the latest on publication, so that someone was holding back his share. Looking to the future he requested that, if the book later appeared as a volume, Mette at least should not be sent the money that it earned.

He wrote to Morice more firmly, possibly, than tactfully. He felt however that he did not owe him his thanks for keeping back money that was not his to keep. Morice was upset when he received the letter, having for some reason expected Gauguin to be merely charitable, once again, in his conclusions. Later, however, Gauguin sent him one of his canvases to show "how far he placed himself above all those who do not behave correctly."

December opened as badly as the preceding months. Gauguin again could see a penniless new year, continued silence from Chaudet and a permanent lack of funds. De Monfreid tried to encourage him to keep going, to *tenir la cape*, to close-reef, but Gauguin reminded him in his quality of seaman, that one does not close-reef, nor lie-to, unless one can rig the fore-staysail and the spanker. "I have looked in vain," he said, "in the sail-room for these bits of canvas and I cannot find them." He was still unable to obtain bread, but sometimes his *vahiné* was able to catch fresh-water shrimps and to bring back from the mountains guavas and mangoes that ripened at this season. The decision that he had once taken and once post-poned could not now be postponed again. If no money came from Chaudet by the January mail-boat, he was determined to carry out his decision and to kill himself then. His health was again much improved, so that the chances of Nature doing for him soon what he wished were as far off as before.

During the month that preceded the arrival of the January mail, he worked on a big picture that he had long had in mind. He scarcely slept, painting until the light failed and beginning again as soon as the sun had risen. He wished to have finished the canvas, an immense panel more than 14ft. 6in. long and 5ft. 6in. high, in case Chaudet did in fact send nothing and he found himself obliged to carry out his resolve. There was little chance he knew of money from any other source.

He had not enough canvas of good quality, so he was obliged to employ a rough sacking that was full of knots and faults. He worked with an uncontrolled passion, altering nothing, nor needing to do so, feeling the whole of his energy and the justification of his way of painting pass into the picture. He followed no rules. The composition came from his mind, and he needed no models nor any carefully drawn and thought-out sketches.

He finished the canvas in time. The January mail brought him nothing, no letter even. The future that he had foreseen was again before him and the time had finally come for carrying

out his resolve. He had on occasions been given arsenic for the treating of the chronic eczema of his feet and he had gradually accumulated a quantity of the poison which he considered would be sufficient for a fatal dose. If he had had a revolver he would have preferred to shoot himself, but he had none and could buy none. To have borrowed one, if he could have found one, would probably have made his neighbours suspicious.

He left before sunset and walked up alone into the mountains to hide where he knew that the ants would quickly eat his body. In the evening he took the arsenic as he had planned. He had argued with himself and his act seemed the only one that was logical and possible. He had given his illness a long enough opportunity of killing him. It is not known what arrangements he had made for the disposal of his property.

In the morning Gauguin returned to Punavia, for the poison had merely allowed him to experience a night of atrocious suffering. The arsenic was probably present in too small a quantity to prove fatal, although Gauguin himself imagined that the dose had been too strong and that his consequent violent vomiting had freed his body of the greater part of it. The month that followed was one of continual suffering. He could eat nothing, even in the smallest quantities, without nausea, his head scarcely ceased to ache and he suffered from continual attacks of giddiness.

With well-timed irony, the February mail-boat brought him money from Chaudet, and one hundred and fifty francs from his friend Maufra, a first and tardy payment on his debt to him. But the idea of suicide was over and apart from later regrets that he had not been able to die on the mountain, he never again considered killing himself. Towards Chaudet he now felt indulgent, considering him, in spite of his vagueness and apparent lack of bargain-keeping, a good fellow who was fond of other distractions than his business and who was in constant need of stimulation. He was even indulgent towards his inability to write a comprehensible and explanatory business letter and was not unduly surprised that his explanation of his

intermittent silences was that he imagined that Gauguin had achieved financial independence on the day when he had sent Daniel de Monfreid his large order for brushes and colours. The mystery as to why he did not send every month the one hundred and fifty francs that he was collecting for him remained unsolved, and for the moment Gauguin continued to prompt Daniel to find out the reason. Gauguin's patience with those who owed and promised him money, and who did not send it, continued to be unlimited, and the explanations that he made to himself uniformly charitable. It was most fortunate. He, at least, avoided the suspicion that such people were taking advantage of his inaccessibility to be forgetful.

With Maufra's money he paid his most pressing debts and settled down to the same existence as before until May, when that month would bring a solution with it in the form of a foreclosure by the bank from whom he had borrowed the money to buy his land. When his property was sold and with it, in all probability, his paintings also, he would have to find another way of existing.

The crisis that had led up to his attempted suicide had produced two things that were beneficent: the clearing for a time from his mind of his preoccupation with death, and the painting of the canvas which he was now convinced was his chief work. He told Daniel of his attempted suicide and then of "the big picture." "It is true that one cannot be a good judge of oneself, but I believe all the same not only that this canvas surpasses in value all my others, but that I shall never do a better nor a similar. I put into it, before dying, all my energy, so much painful eagerness in terrible circumstances, and such a definite unalterable vision, that anything hasty disappeared, and vitality surged into it. It does not stink of models, methods, or would-be rules—from which I have always freed myself, sometimes, however, with fear. It is a canvas of 4m. 50 by 1m. 70 in height. The two top corners are chrome yellow with the inscription ["D'où venons-nous, que sommes-nous, où allons-nous?"], and my signature on the right like a fresco



D'OÙ VENONS-NOUS, QUE SOMMES-NOUS, OÙ ALLONS-NOUS?



damaged at the corners and painted on a gold wall. To the right and at the bottom, a sleeping baby, then three women squatting. Two figures dressed in purple are confiding in each other their thoughts; a large figure, intentionally and in spite of the perspective, squatting, is raising its arms in the air and is looking astonished at these two people who dare to think of their destiny. A figure in the middle is picking a fruit. Two cats near a child. A white she-goat. An idol, with its two arms mysteriously and rhythmically raised, seems to be pointing to the after-world. A squatting figure seems to be listening to the idol; finally, an old woman near death, who seems to accept and to resign herself to her thoughts, finishes the legend; at her feet, a strange white bird holding a lizard in its claw represents the uselessness of vain words. The whole scene is placed beside a stream in a wood. In the background the sea, then the mountains of the neighbouring island [Moorea]. In spite of the variations of tones, the aspect of the landscape is from end to end continuously blue and veronese green. On top of it, all the nude figures stand out in a strong orange. If one said to the pupils of the Beaux-Arts for the Prix de Rome: 'The picture that you have to do must represent: Whence come we, what are we, whither are we going?'—what would they do? I have done a philosophic work on this theme comparative with the Gospel: I believe it is good . . . [it] has absorbed for some time all my vitality; I look at it continuously and really (*I admit it to you*) I admire it. The more I see it the more I realise the *enormous mathematical* faults that I don't wish to alter at any price—it is going to remain as it is, in the condition of a sketch if you like."

Gauguin renewed his interest in the sale of his pictures and suggested that Vollard might have a new canvas a month, on the quiet, to see if he could sell them. But the news that a friend, a poet, had taken two of his canvases to Norway to try to sell them there, made him "tremble." This friend was about to marry a Finn. "I pity the poor woman," he carped, "if actually women are to be pitied at all."

If he could have sold each picture as he painted it for only two hundred francs, half the price that he had put on an average sized canvas when he left France, he would now have been more than content, for such a price would have enabled him to live comfortably in Tahiti. "Sell," he told Daniel, "without fear then at any price; it will be time enough to make an increase when the public begins to take an interest."

In April, having received no further money, and with his debt of one thousand two hundred francs to the bank falling due in the following month, Gauguin went to Papeete. After having "prostrated" himself before the Government, he obtained, at the salary of six francs a day, drawing and writing work in the Office of Public Works and Surveys. Out of his salary of thirty-six francs a week, he was obliged to rent a hut in Papeete. He was fifty years of age. His taskmaster was a soldier in the Artillery. "What does it matter, I am going to swallow my pride and God knows how I shall do the work. . . . If only I had died the other month. One cannot say that I have not done my duty and everything that was possible to close-reef. I've therefore given up painting unless one day—which seems improbable to me—things return to normal."

De Monfreid had recently written advising him to consider returning to Paris and to take up again his old brokerage work as a solution to the perpetual financial crises in his Polynesian life. Gauguin had more than once announced that it was obvious that he would never be able to earn a living by painting. Now, however, to attempt to return to the conditions of his past life after a lapse of fifteen years appeared impossible to him. Firstly, he did not know from where he would ever get the money for the passage to Europe and, secondly, he felt that there was too much Jewish youth always ready to enter banking houses for people to want "an old man of fifty." And from the experience that he had had he was not sure that it would be easier to obtain six francs a day in Paris than in Papeete.

The April mail had been delayed owing to an accident.

When it did arrive Gauguin received only a long and enquiring letter from a man whom he took to be a Dutchman, Meier-Graefe, and who declared that he was anxious to write a detailed and serious work in German on him. Gauguin referred him to Daniel, with the comment that if he were not rich he might have good connections: "It would, therefore, be good to use him if possible. Holland is an extraordinary country for the sale of pictures . . . often good winds come from abroad; witness the sales made by my wife for her profit." But of the proposed work by Meier-Graefe, who was a German, nothing more is heard.

May came and with it a new and agonising delay of ten days in the arrival of the mail, for the bank had to be repaid its loan. When the mail-ship came to the island, there was again nothing from either Chaudet or Maufra, but Daniel and Annette sent him an unexpected sum of money that enabled him to pacify the bank by a payment on account of capital and interest and to obtain a delay of a further five months for the remainder of his debt. The rest of the money went to pay the Chinese baker and his bill at the chemist's shop. His new work permitted him however to live and not to contract further debts, and he determined to continue with his work until he had received enough money from France to pay off all his remaining debts and to leave him with a thousand francs in his pocket.

The next twelve months allowed Gauguin a little peace. His finances for the first time caused him no worry and the whole period proved to be one of comparative prosperity. His health fluctuated as it always did. He had not yet fully recovered from the effects of the arsenic, but with money to buy the medicines that he needed he was able to pass the months in comparative comfort. He held on to his work in Papeete in the Office of Public Works and Surveys until the New Year, when he considered at last that he was entitled to return to Punavia. The French Government by then had had his services for eight months, but he had not been able every month to give them his undivided attention for on occasions the condition

of his broken ankle forced him to stay away from the drawing office, sometimes for as long as three days in a week, and his earnings were at times as low as ninety francs a month.

The Spanish-American War now added an important factor to the disorganisation of the mails. When he felt low in spirits, or when he received no news, he could not help ranting against his debtors whom he felt were responsible for his present condition of life and sometimes regretting that he was still alive. But a certain whining twist in his character, that appears now so deeply characteristic of him, must be understood as the inheritance of months and years of worry and uncertainty, of appalling physical suffering, and of the *maladif* self-pity for which his illness was responsible. Later this state of mind was to give way to the quarrelsome attitude, towards any of those—but particularly Government officials—who crossed him or interfered with him or ignored him unduly, that was to prove disastrous to him and bring him into a state of perpetual antagonism with people who might have been willing to leave him alone if he had not felt it to be his duty to criticise their frequently corrupt actions.

In July Gauguin was able to enlist the services of a naval officer to take to France the canvases that he had painted that year. He was anxious that they should be exhibited as soon as possible. He gave Daniel, who was to have control of the arrangements, every latitude of price, even for the "big picture." For this he suggested a simple frame, ten centimetres wide, painted with lime to give the effect of a mural. He also sent a list of those whom he thought should be invited to the exhibition: Degas, Rouart, Renoir, Octave Mirbeau, de la Rochefoucauld, Puvis de Chavannes, Mallarmé, Chaplet, Anatole France, Odilon Redon, Jean Dolent, Rodin, Manzi, Geffroy and Roger Marx among them, but purposely excluding "all the Sérusier—Denis band," as well as the Press. There was to be little talk of the exhibition, and the cards were to go out only a few days before it opened. The dealers Portier and Vollard were to have cards to give to those whom they thought

were "susceptible" to buying. The canvases arrived in due course and the exhibition took place. Gauguin had however to wait seven months before he heard the result, which then appeared to him and which he characterised as a disaster.

Throughout the rest of the year, money came by nearly every mail. Gauguin found himself at last completely free from debt, but with an unusual foresight he continued with his daily work in Papeete. His *vahiné* does not seem to have been there with him, having most probably for the time returned to her family.

In October he entered the hospital for three weeks in order to have treatment for his foot. This time he was not an *indigent* and was presented, on leaving, with a bill for several hundred francs. But he was so much better that he again began to hope one day to be cured.

With the prospect of regaining his liberty and of being able to return to Punavia, he asked Daniel for European seeds and roots for his garden—single dahlias, nasturtiums, sunflowers, and others that did well in hot climates. Papeete was in a depressed mood. War appeared possible between France and England, mails were more and more irregular.

Daniel had reproached him severely for his attempted suicide, his "escapade," as unworthy of him. In defence, Gauguin pleaded his difficulties. Rather incoherently he declared: ". . . If you knew into what state my mind has got during those three years of suffering: If I am never to paint again, I who now love that only—neither wife, nor children—my heart is empty. Am I a criminal? I do not know." He had also just heard of the death of his old friend Stéphane Mallarmé and this he felt very much. "He is another," he added, "who has died a martyr to art: his life at least was as fine as his work."

Liberty came in January 1899, for sufficient money arrived from Daniel de Monfreid to provide him with food and necessities for six months. He returned to Punavia to find his hut in a condition almost of ruin. Rats had destroyed the roof

in the nine months of his absence and rain had soaked through, ruining much inside. A quantity of drawings, important papers, and a large unfinished canvas had been eaten by cockroaches. With the money he had in hand he at once made arrangements for repairing the roof and putting the hut in order. He was also obliged to buy new clothes, for he had scarcely any left. He spent a little freely, but he had every reason to think that money would continue to arrive. If he later realised that he had been extravagant at this time, he had the consolation of feeling that his expenses had been unavoidable and that they had saved and improved the value of his property.

The next month's mail was three weeks late in arriving, but it brought from Daniel de Monfreid the long awaited news of the exhibition of his "big picture," and of the others that he had sent at the same time. Vollard, the dealer, had bought eight—all, with the exception of the "big picture," of the most important canvases in the exhibition. The "big picture" was not sold at the same time as the rest and Gauguin hoped that he would receive a reasonable offer for it. By August no offer had come and he became impatient, but he heard nothing more until Vollard enquired its price in a letter which reached him over a year later. Gauguin then asked 1,500 francs (£60). ". . . not less, otherwise I would like to keep it."

Gauguin looked upon this deal as a disaster. Vollard was not a collector. He was a dealer, and dealers usually acted on behalf of their clients. Now, however, Vollard had bought outright all his most recent work and held in consequence a form of monopoly in that work for the immediate future. "It really is bad luck," he told de Monfreid. ". . . This stunning blow obsesses me and I cannot sleep. . . . In future sell as you think fit to private people, but to Vollard nothing unless at reasonable prices."

De Monfreid had undoubtedly thought that he was doing a good piece of business for Gauguin by selling the canvases *en bloc*, even if the prices were not large. The deal would at least

provide Gauguin with funds, although as it happened he was not in immediate need of money and a precipitous sale of his latest work was not then such a necessity as it might once have been. Chaudet had been ill at the time of the exhibition, and this Gauguin felt was an unearned misfortune.

He was, as yet, in no mood to begin painting again and, although he had enough money for half a year, there was now little chance of Chaudet or de Monfreid sending him money for many months. He estimated that his next parcel of canvases would only reach de Monfreid in September 1900, nineteen months later. It is difficult to imagine what he thought at that time would be the cause of this long delay, unless it were a pathetic or self-pitying over-estimate of time intended to wound or cause remorse in Daniel de Monfreid, written in a moment of petulant disappointment. De Monfreid, for some reason, did not give him his opinion on his new canvases and this depressed him, for he imagined from his silence that his friend saw nothing to admire. A note from Schuffenecker, unhappy this time because he was not a genius, did not help to lift his gloom.

To Daniel he said: "Why did I not die last year? I shall soon be fifty-one, worn out, tired in every limb; my sight gets worse each day; consequently the strength necessary for this incessant struggle is missing."

Gauguin had scarcely had time to put his hut at Punavia in order again when his *vahiné* returned to him to give birth to a child. Her parents and other relations came with her to help, and to pray. Gauguin told them to be patient and to let nature act, but in vain. The excitement and prayers continued. It was the day when the public conveyance was due to pass and take letters to Papeete for the mail-boat, and Gauguin was interrupted in his monthly note to de Monfreid by the simultaneous arrival of the conveyance and his *vahiné's* labour pains.

The child was a boy and almost white. Gauguin was glad to have a son, and felt that he might help him to take a proper

interest in life again. The birth of the first child, which his *vahiné* had expected towards the end of 1896, was never chronicled by him. Either the child was immediately adopted by neighbours, or it died. But the new infant proved healthy and strong and "lovely like everything adulterous." He was no more expensive to keep than any young animal that was fed by its mother. Gauguin felt that he could see it growing and that it would develop in time into a "real bull." For the moment it was quiet, well formed, and gave signs of intelligence. His *vahiné* dressed it in a few scraps of cotton, sewn together. Its presence did not bother Gauguin in his work, and it amused him to remark a trifle grimly, "Children do not bother me for I 'abandon them'; I am a first-class bounder who has abandoned his wife and his children."

Daniel's seeds arrived in March or April, and Gauguin planted them at once. Beside dahlias, iris, gladioli and anemones, there were chrysanthemums, petunias, phlox, daisies, sunflowers, poppies, wallflowers, and salpiglossis. The iris, dahlias and gladioli came up immediately, but the anemone roots vanished into the earth. By May his garden, with the new flowers and the native flowering shrubs, promised to be as he had once hoped to see it. He was determined now to stay and die there, and if there were still to be difficulties over finding money for food—he had only 100 francs left—he was prepared to put up with them. At the same time he hired help to dig a vegetable garden. Land values had been rising in Tahiti and he estimated his property to be worth 3,500 francs, in place of the 1,000 that it had originally cost him just two years before. His coco-nut palms produced 150 francs of copra yearly, and he felt justified in congratulating himself over his foresight and perseverance.

Daniel de Monfreid, who had for years divided his time between his Paris studio and his Mediterranean yacht, had now decided to settle on his property of Saint Clément. This was a blow for Gauguin, for he imagined that he would have to find someone else to represent him in Paris. Aristide Maillol was

suggested to de Monfreid, for Gauguin thought he was sufficiently altruistic to take the job on, "but as always the good are themselves poor and very busy with the difficulties of life . . . he is an artist and a good fellow from the little I know of him. . . . His art is too distinguished for people to take notice of it." Schuffenecker he ruled out as "brute-like . . . even mischievous, unbalanced through an excess of vanity. What is it you tell me about his wife?" he asked Daniel, "she is asking for a divorce ! . . . Ah! yes, marriage, you know a little about it, my poor Daniel, as I do: one only gets out of it with something broken."

June saw a return of Gauguin's old system of taking credit from the Chinese bakers. Maurice Denis wrote asking him to exhibit in the following year with the "Symbolists, Pointillists and *Rose Croix*," an invitation which Gauguin declined sarcastically, saying that he could not, without risk, exhibit alongside so many masters whose work he had so unworthily copied, although those he mentioned would hardly have fallen into this category. "I was born of Cézanne, of Van Gogh, of Bernard . . . what a clever *pasticheur* I am!" It gave him the idea, however, of holding at Vollard's Gallery an exhibition of his own that would coincide with the exhibition mentioned by Denis. The time was approaching, however, when he was to need all his powers of sarcasm and invective for dealing with local problems.

Chapter Twenty

CONTROVERSIES

Gauguin's appearance and property had begun to attract a certain unwanted attention, and a number of petty thefts took place which Gauguin imagined were only committed because the thieves considered him impotent and unable to defend himself. Owing to the work that he had been forced to take at Papeete, certain members of the European *bourgeoisie* of the island now appeared to wish to ignore him. Among these was the magistrate of his district, who seemed even to refuse him justice by passing over the charges that had been laid before him by the *mutoï*, the native *gendarme*, against those who had committed theft on his property.

Gauguin consequently wrote an open letter to the magistrate and arranged for it to be printed in the June number of a Papeete newspaper, known as *Les Guêpes*, that was owned by a certain French merchant, a strong-minded freethinker, who had once been a sailor and who was now one of the richer men on the island. This man, whose chief private interests were political, had opened the four pages of his monthly journal to critical articles of all kinds, and particularly those that dealt with the administration of the island and with the struggles and jealousies of the Catholic and Protestant factions. Gauguin had added on occasions his comments on the stultifying and puritanical and, to his point of view, disastrous effect of their rival influences. Gauguin is supposed to have helped to found the paper, or at least to edit it, and it provided him now with the best facilities for his attack.

Gauguin's letter was purposely "very violent" in tone and had the objective of provoking a duel with the magistrate or, at the worst, an airing of the whole affair by a prosecution of himself. He imagined that the magistrate would take the less honourable course of bringing him before the judge and of

obtaining a prison sentence. This he did not fear. He was only vulnerable, he knew, if a fine were imposed upon him.

In the course of his long complaint, which gossip declared was in fact solely provoked by his anger at the acquittal of a former *vahiné* of the name of Pauraa Tai whom he had accused of stealing a ring and a coffee-mill and of trespassing on his property at night by sweeping among the brushwood with a house broom, Gauguin declared that he and his neighbours had suffered thefts and depredations which had gone unpunished although the thieves were known, and that it had become notorious in his district that he could be "robbed, fallen upon" with impunity. He added that he expected the laws of the island to function for him as they did for others, to protect him, or to punish him if he ceased to be an honest man. If the magistrate had behaved in the way that he had with the idea of treading on his toes and of making a fool of him, he would have the honour to send him his seconds. If, on the other hand, he were willing to admit that he had not the strength to "conduct a *parquet*, nor even to wax it," he would ask the Government to send him back to France where he could recommence his law studies. "You have no powers, sir," Gauguin told him somewhat tartly; "you have only duties." The style, grammar and phrasing of his letter were all uncertain, and for the moment Gauguin's logic and dignity seemed to have left him under the stress of his anger and his sense of grievance.

The letter appeared and must have caused a sensation, but the magistrate, most wisely, took no steps. Gauguin was disgusted. "What rottenness in our colonies," he commented to Daniel, but he was undoubtedly fortunate that no action was taken, for such action could only have ended in a sentence for slander or in a fine, or both.

The event had, however, the salutary and immediate effect of putting an end to the thieving, while he himself had achieved a fatal victory of defiance which, backed by a sense of impunity, marked the beginning of his quarrels with all administrative

officials in Oceania. Later, when he had taken refuge from the *imbéciles* of Tahiti in the Marquesas Archipelago, his dislike of the results of Western influences was to drive him into a perpetual but heroic and losing war with all authority in his defence of the rights of the islanders.

In the same number of *Les Guêpes,* Gauguin published another article, very different in style and intention, which proved that he was still capable of rational and unviolent criticism. In it he compared the unofficial activities in France's colonising history of the poet, Arthur Rimbaud, with those of Captain Marchand, whose presence in Fashoda in 1898 had brought France and Great Britain nearly to war. It showed also the very definite views held by Gauguin on the duties of a colonising country and explains his later violent championing of the Marquesan islanders in their struggle with a restrictive and injurious colonial regime. "During the course of the year of 1898[1]," Gauguin wrote, "I received a sad piece of news, the death of Arthur Rimbaud (a friend). Rimbaud was a poet, considered consequently by a portion of society, along with all artists, as a being without use on this earth. The world of letters was moved, for he was a very exceptional poet of great intelligence, but that was all. It is necessary, without however going deep into the question in so short a space, to say once and for all that the words 'Glory of a country, usefulness' are generally understood in a completely inverse sense, especially when it is a question of colonisation. To colonise is to cultivate a country, to make an undeveloped region produce things helpful, first of all, to the happiness of those who inhabit it: a noble cause; to conquer it and plant a flag, to instal a parasitical administration kept going at enormous cost by and for the sole glory of a metropolis is an uncivilised and shameful stupidity.

"Rimbaud, the poet, the dreamer, explored on his own initiative and without any other encouragement or resources than his own desire for freedom and to do good. He went, as one knows, nearly always on foot, alone and without much money.

[1] *Rimbaud died at Marseilles in 1891.*

In 1880, when he reached Aden, he knew as thoroughly as he did French—of which he remained one of the masters—English, German, Dutch, Russian, Swedish, Spanish, Italian, all European languages. Profiting from his stay in Aden, in a relatively sedentary employment, he quickly learned, at the same time as Arabic and various Eastern dialects, a theoretical and practical knowledge of engineering. Then he left, still alone, to explore Africa. Without other assistance than the modest manner of a gentleman, he succeeded in making himself respected, even adored by savage races, who had until that time been feared by travellers, and to whom he taught industry and dignity. 'At Obock,' Rimbaud wrote in 1885, 'the little French administration is only occupied with feasting and spending the funds of the Government, who will never return a sou to this horrible little colony, colonised up till now by a dozen filibusters only.' It is to be feared that in many French possessions the situation is not proportionately better than on the Somali coast. The source of civilisation in Abyssinia is, one can guarantee, the work of Arthur Rimbaud, whose actions, in spite of the chicanery of the Empress Taïtou, were from 1888 to 1891 decisive as much as regards Menelik as Ras Makonnen, his friends and admirers. There, in a few words, is the work of an individual, J. A. Rimbaud, poet, dreamer—therefore a useless person—through his solitary initiative and without money, without Government support."

Gauguin then traced the ignominious adventure of Captain Marchand, who left for the Sudan at the head of an armed force, backed by the Government through the Colonial Ministry, and whose zeal allowed him to reach the Nile, at Fashoda, and to "sign a treaty with the Grand Meck although he had no interpreter and was ignorant of the language of the country." The meeting with British troops under Kitchener and Marchand's forced withdrawal from Fashoda followed. "By this rapid biographical survey," Gauguin concluded, "one can, we assure you, now see the essential differences that characterised Rimbaud and Marchand and that made us choose them as

two opposed types of colonising agent. To judge by apparent means, one would have thought that of the two he who should have accomplished the greater civilising mission was the officer, not the confounded poet. However, it was the exact opposite. In France, where a spirit of initiative is nearly always missing from individuals called to manage new territorial acquisitions, colonial policy is the enemy of colonisation."

Gauguin's very definite ideas on the delicate subject of colonial administration cannot have been shared by many of his readers outside the little circle of the owner of *Les Guêpes*.

Little else that he wrote for this newspaper had any but local, controversial, or bickering value, but his occasional articles brought him before the Papeete public and possibly a little more regard than he had before enjoyed.

His finances fell low again during the second half of the year and his debt to the Chinese store began to mount up. His ankle caused him renewed suffering, and in consequence he was unable to work. Had he been well, however, an almost complete lack of canvas and colours would have had the same result, for, with a strange and uneconomic access of prudence, he had not dared to order more until he felt surer of his financial future. In July he had but three metres of canvas left, almost no paints and not a "millimetre" of vermilion, which was his favourite colour. Chaudet broke his silence in September with a small tube of that colour which Gauguin had long before requested, but the tube was unaccompanied by money, as Gauguin had foreseen, and it was for the time useless. "I have no more canvas for painting, and besides I am too discouraged still to paint," he told de Monfreid; "too occupied each moment with my material life. What is the use, anyway, if my work is destined to accumulate with you, which must be a nuisance for you, or sold *en masse* to Vollard for a scrap of bread."

The canvases which he had been sending to de Monfreid arrived in France most often badly cracked. His friend wrote advising the use of a thicker impasto, but this Gauguin found

an unsuitable process in a hot climate where it was necessary for each application of colour to dry before overpainting and a slow process that would have reduced his production to a third, as well as costing far more in paint than he could afford. He came to the conclusion that the cracking was the fault of the inferior American white lead which was sold in the island and which he used to prepare his canvas, and that an addition of linseed oil would remedy the fault. Daniel advised the use of castor oil, which Gauguin obediently tried; but the resulting oily medium was not one in which he cared to paint. "If you can find me someone who will assure me 2,400 francs a year for five years, as well as colours in abundance, I'll do anything you like, paint in impasto which takes three times as much time . . . in any case it is very difficult for me to paint in a thick impasto for—for twelve years as you know—I have painted on an absorbent canvas and have had the desired and unchangeable effects of colours *just as I wished*. Besides, the expense of colours was ten times less. . . . Anyway, for the moment I must do the best I can, and what I can, which is not worth a couple of damns."

In default of new canvas, and in spite of his declared discouragement, Gauguin set to work in September on a number of unfinished things, for he had heard that a warship would be returning to France and would arrive in time for the Universal Exhibition of 1900. As before, he was probably to put his paintings in the charge of one of the officers. But the immediate result of this activity was only a small series of wood-cuts which he sent to Daniel. He had finally decided to exhibit drawings and wood-cuts with a few canvases only, but the consignment was delayed for months owing to a misunderstanding over the address and when the time came nothing that he had intended to exhibit was shown, while, without his knowledge, an early portrait of a woman was hung in the Exhibition and passed almost unnoticed in a gallery of mixed paintings.

Meanwhile Gauguin's victory over the magistrate with his newspaper article encouraged him to undertake an ambitious

scheme for the editing, printing and publishing of a monthly paper of his own, in which he could air his opinions and state his criticisms on every subject from art and literature to the chronic mis-administration of the island. This newspaper made its first appearance under the title of *Le Sourire* in August 1899 and caused a good deal of comment. He had intended it to appear every month, but this he was not able to do and its appearance was irregular after a time. Although the copies passed mostly from hand to hand, he was able to make, at the beginning, a small profit on the undertaking. Many of the articles bore his own name, others a Tahitian pseudonym, *Tit Oil*, which had a pungent and salacious implication.

Le Sourire consisted of four pages, mimeographed by the Edison system, on schoolroom paper about 12 in. long by 10 in. wide. The circulation appears to have been a little over twenty copies and was sold at the price of three *raira* a copy. At the head of the first page was set a wood-cut, with the title of the paper and figures with or without birds and animals, that varied with each issue. As if to assure his readers that his intentions were not wholly aggressive, he prefaced the first issue with an aphorism: "Grave men smile, the title invites it," and a modest apology for its appearance. "With so much time on my hands, with such an array of pet but possibly eccentric ideas, I have founded *Le Sourire*. Shapeless at close range, these writings upon reflection and examination will become more definite if you wish it. I shall not tell the truth: everyone prides himself on telling it. Fable only shall show my thoughts, if dreaming is, in truth, thinking. Often a drawing also, a few lines only."

The first few numbers bore the subsidiary title of *Journal Sérieux*, which was, however, soon changed to *Journal Méchant*.

The contents of this paper followed the same editorial lines as *Les Guêpes*, but they consisted mostly of fables containing comic and disguised allusions. In particular the paper singled out the Protestant Mission, and all those who were suspected of supporting it, for attack. The Governor of the day, a Monsieur

Gallet, received his full share of criticism under the nickname of the "Emperor Gaspard," while other notable residents, including the Protestant pastor of Gauguin's district, were not forgotten. One of the promised drawings, of more than just a few lines, caricatured Monsieur Gallet, dressed in a vaudeville version of his Colonial uniform and riding a bucking, undersized horse. Banners floating from a camp in the background bore legends—"Société de Genève" and "Amer Suisse"—in reference to the stronghold of Protestantism, while the motto of the whole was "Malbrough s'en va ten guer." Gauguin saw in the civilising efforts of the Protestant Mission, which in Tahiti had a far greater influence than the Catholic Church, the bringer of all the evils from which the islanders suffered and the cause of the insupportable hypocrisy that the islanders were forced to practise in religious and amatory matters. Later, in the Marquesas, it was the Catholic Mission which received his attention, and his attacks. At the moment, however, it was enough for him to suspect a resident or official of sympathy with the Protestants for them to be pilloried in his paper.

The only interesting fact in connection with the publication of *Le Sourire* is the remarkable one that none of Gauguin's personal attacks got him into trouble. It is possible that the publication was tolerated for the amusement that it gave or indulgently treated because of the effect that the climate was known to have on certain settlers, that it made them sometimes a little mad. Gauguin concluded that he was respected, but the impunity which he enjoyed cannot seriously be ascribed to this, for if he had the respect of anyone it was the respect of the islanders and not of the *imbécile* functionaries in Papeete. But the islanders' respect was alone what he wanted; if the others were to have had an emotion towards him he would have preferred it to have been a little humble fear, which there is no reason, unfortunately, to suppose was their reaction towards him.

Gauguin sent a few chosen numbers to de Monfreid.

"Sometimes trivial, but biting" was his own comment on them. It is uncertain how long *Le Sourire* appeared, but it is probable that it died when it no longer paid, which may have been as soon as the novelty of the venture no longer interested the white population of the island.

The month of January 1900 brought Gauguin an important proposition from Ambroise Vollard which he accepted and which, if it had worked with regularity, should have relieved him of money worries for the rest of his life. Vollard proposed that, in return for twenty-five canvases a year, Gauguin should accept a fixed and regular monthly pension of 300 francs, which, even with the rising cost of living in Tahiti, would have provided him with all the money for his living expenses that he required. Chaudet had just at this time ceased to represent him and de Monfreid was to live permanently outside Paris, as Gauguin already knew. He had even thought of Sérusier as a possible replacer of Chaudet, but Vollard's offer settled the matter for him.

Gauguin sent his reply to Vollard to his friend Daniel, with instructions. "I am sending you my reply, so that you can read it carefully and be able to deal with him by repeating my letter to him, in a very *unconcerned manner*." Maurice Denis had replied to his refusal to exhibit with the "Symbolists, Pointillists and *Rose Croix*" by giving Gauguin the unsuspected news that Degas and Rouart were competing for his pictures and that certain dealers were speculating in him and that his canvases were reaching "nice prices" in the sales. This was incomprehensible to Gauguin after the difficulty with which his paintings seemed to sell and made him suspect that all was not as it appeared.

Vollard's offer seemed to him a good one, however, particularly as he was not mortgaging his whole output. He reflected and added to de Monfreid: "All the same, I don't really care if Vollard or another earns a lot of money out of me if by this means I succeed in being to the windward of my buoy: later on, we shall see about tightening the reins." He sent to his friend

at the same time a signed paper that could be used in the event of delay threatening owing to the absence of his signature to the contract. He advised Daniel to give the impression, when bargaining, that he was indifferent to the whole proposal, and that if anyone desired the arrangement, it was Vollard alone, but he added in parenthesis: "God knows how necessary for me it is!"

De Monfreid was given instructions that he could accept less than had been offered if it were for some reason necessary, two hundred francs a month instead of three hundred, and 175 francs a canvas instead of two hundred, while drawings were to be paid for at the rate of forty francs each. Old canvases in his or Chaudet's hands were not to be sold at these new low prices and drawings, if taken, were to be treated separately. Chaudet's stock of canvases, that had been deposited with Vollard, was to be checked, as well as all his sculptures and potteries and Japanese prints, and his two remaining and unsold paintings by Van Gogh. The contract with Vollard was to be fixed, or abandoned immediately, and if fixed the advances were to begin at once. In case, but only if, the deal with Vollard went through he also gave de Monfreid, at last, an order for canvas and over 100 tubes of colour, which were to be of a good quality, for he had found that the last which he had ordered three years before, of the quality known as *décoration,* did not stand the climate, particularly the ultramarines and lakes which had thickened into a "pitchy gelatine," and the veronese green which had contained white that had come to the surface as it dried. The canvas was to be two metres wide, thick-grained and a trifle shaggy—"the knots do not bother me," he said, "I cut them off"—and prepared beforehand with size mixed with a little spanish white, or alternatively canvas such as "Puvis de Chavannes used," as little prepared as possible. *C'est d'un cher! d'un cher!* he added, regretfully. Brushes he had forgotten, but he remembered to order them the following month, as well as a small homœopathic medicine chest in order that he could treat,

when the occasion arose, any islanders who might be suffering from one or many of the imported diseases of Western civilisation or from local infections. Everything was to be accompanied by invoices showing the lowest possible figures owing to the 20 per cent duty which he would have to pay in Tahiti.

Daniel de Monfreid obeyed his instructions, but Gauguin's fears that he might have to accept less than the proposed three hundred francs a month were unfounded, for an agreement was reached on that basis which held good for the rest of his life. With the fixing of this monthly pension his financial worries should have been over, but the subsequent irregularity with which he received the money destroyed any feeling of security that he may, at the beginning, have had.

Throughout the five years since he had returned to Tahiti the cost of living had been rising and now was twice as high as it had been in 1895. The personal tax paid by each settler had been raised from 24 to 32 francs, and there was a proposal by the local administration to impose an export tax on the island's produce which threatened to lower the price to be obtained for copra, the dried kernel of coco-nuts, as well as for all other products. He was beginning to chafe under these and other, real and imaginary, restrictions. He had for some months already expended a great deal of amusing invective in his newspaper, without any of his victims taking the least official notice of the attacks. The "rottenness" of the colony seemed greater than ever before, and a new impatience and restlessness began to take hold of him. Tahiti was becoming too civilised and was already too smug, restricted, and Mission-ridden. From the point of view of his painting there was an even greater drawback. He now found it almost impossible to obtain models owing to the extension of the Mission's influence. His old desire to visit the Marquesas Archipelago returned. The Archipelago lay out of the track of frequent ships and was populated by the finest of all the Polynesian races. It had not escaped the attentions of the missionaries, he knew, but the

same degree of civilised restriction had not, fortunately, yet been achieved there. Various causes held him in Tahiti for over eighteen months more, but the longer he was obliged to stay the greater became his determination to make one last attempt to escape from the *imbéciles* of his encompassing world.

During the recent experiments that he had been making in printing from wood-cuts, he had stumbled on a discovery which, when perfected, he considered might revolutionise printing, particularly work for fine editions. With the object of perfecting his discovery chemically, he entered into an arrangement with a cashiered artillery officer, whose professional misfortunes had not apparently altered his capabilities in other directions. He had had to risk the theft of his discovery by his collaborator. From the absence of any later reference to this discovery, it may be concluded that the process could not be chemically perfected, although, with Gauguin's ability for being tricked and cheated, it is not inconceivable that this happened to him also over this.

While waiting to know the result of Daniel's negotiations with Vollard, Gauguin heard of Chaudet's death, and a number of facts appeared which showed that even he had not acted with entire honesty. The large debt, which Gauguin had left behind when he returned to Tahiti and which Chaudet had arranged to collect in instalments of 150 francs a month, had been fully settled two years before, although Chaudet had not told Gauguin nor sent him the money. His former debtor had even also bought three of his pictures, of which Gauguin had likewise known nothing. Chaudet's accounts showed the sale of his Cézannes at an extraordinarily low figure, although paintings by Cézanne were beginning to fetch good prices. The whole position was highly unsatisfactory, but Gauguin could do nothing beyond writing to the dealer's brother to say that he could not understand the accounts and that he was obliged to give the matter up as hopeless. Instead of passing judgment on him, however, his charitableness again obtained the upper hand and he concluded that the whole

affair was but thoughtlessness on Chaudet's part and that he had counted one day, when he had the money, on settling the whole thing in his own way. "As for Chaudet," he said to Daniel, "I had confidence in him." Chaudet's brother soon announced however that he had discovered among his deceased brother's papers a note showing that a further 400 francs was due to Gauguin. He was willing to forward this sum, but demanded in advance a receipt from Gauguin "in settlement of everything": a request which Gauguin immediately acceded to, for he was grateful even for four hundred francs out of the wreck of his misplaced confidence. "Don't let us speak of this any more, for it is becoming boring."

Gauguin had not painted since the end of the previous year; his illness and the uncertainty did not encourage him to do so, and the complete lack of colours and canvas continued to prevent him. There was bubonic plague in Sydney as well as in San Francisco, and in April there was talk of closing the port at Papeete owing to the general panic. Necessities had doubled in price; the mails threatened to be further disorganised.

In May, however, Gauguin heard with a first payment of 300 francs that the deal with Vollard had been arranged, and for an indefinite period. Daniel also sent him about a thousand francs which permitted him to pay his debts, while a number of canvases which a returning settler had taken with him at the end of February, before the Vollard deal had been settled, would in due course, Gauguin hoped, provide Daniel with further sums to send. But he was determined, once he had begun again to work, only to sell at low prices those canvases which he was obliged to deliver in order to fulfil the terms of his contract with Vollard. "I have every interest in reserving myself for participation in the rise. You must therefore hide everything of mine you have: what is *supposed* to be unsaleable will be saleable one day."

Gauguin's arrangement with M. Vollard was destined to last exactly three years. It was designed to provide him with a monthly pension that should have liquidated the enervating

financial bothers of the previous seventeen years. But as it was dependent on the human element for its smooth running, it encountered from the earliest months unfortunate but explicable obstacles. The payments arrived regularly for the first two months, but the third payment missed a mail. Gauguin reminded Daniel, who in spite of his threatened departure from Paris still seemed to be able to act for him as he had done before, that the mails left Marseilles every twenty-eight days and not every calendar month, and then resigned himself to wait with patience to see what would happen.

Once again a new mail-service from San Francisco had been promised, beginning in November, which would reduce the length of time for letters to come from Europe to four weeks exactly. The prospect of postal regularity in the new century was bright after the promises and disappointments that the island had known since Gauguin first came there, and now that he was to be paid a regular monthly sum there seemed nothing to prevent the realisation of his long-earned security.

Gauguin on his own admission was, however, in a *maladif* condition, worrying over his inability to begin work again. The consignment of colours had come, but in tubes only half the size that he had intended—an extra cause of bother to him. He worried over his health, which was worse, over the apparent disappearance of the wood-cuts and canvases that he had sent to Daniel for exhibition at the Paris International Exhibition, over whether he would have enough work to deliver to Vollard under his contract and over the information that came to him that the dealer appeared to be doing his utmost to collect together from every source in France as many of his canvases as he could at low prices. An influenza epidemic which broke out in September proved a further cause of delay, for he caught the complaint as did many others at Punavia.

With the next mail-boat came a letter from Vollard that placed Gauguin in an acutely embarrassed position, although

the dealer was doing no more than Gauguin had told him to do. Vollard wrote to say that he was waiting to see de Monfreid in order to give him the money for the various things that Gauguin had ordered, and that in consequence this time he was not sending him the stipulated monthly sum. He promised, however, to send him any money that was over with the allowance of the following month. Gauguin told Daniel of his exasperation: "One must keep an eye on him, then, all the time," he declared without justice. Daniel also received a request. Gauguin asked him to send the female figure in polychrome stoneware with flowing hair and Egypto-negroid features that bore the name of Oviri, the same statuette that Chaplet had once exhibited in his own showcase in the Salon and that had caused so much commotion when Gauguin's signature had been perceived. He wished first to put it in his garden as an ornament and later to place it on his tomb.

Gauguin's property had continued to appreciate in value, and he now believed it to be worth five or six thousand francs, and he was proud that, in spite of his moments of starvation and misery, he had been able nevertheless to save so much. He only needed the Oviri, he felt, to complete its decoration.

The greatest of his worries came with the arrival of the canvas that he had ordered. He had not painted for so long that he knew he needed a period of serious training before he could again feel sure of himself. When the canvas arrived he found that it was non-absorbent, and he felt bewildered. He had mastered the technique of painting on absorbent canvas, and much of the brilliance of his colours was due to this. But to achieve a satisfactory effect with the new canvas he would be obliged, he felt, to undergo not only a period of training but also to learn a completely new trade.

In November the action of the human element in his arrangement with Vollard was only too noticeable. The dealer, who was two months in arrears, sent 200 francs only, "thinking" that he would send 400 francs the following month. "Which means that next month I *shall be debtor* for 600 francs.

You understand well enough that I cannot work under such conditions as these." He had decided to try to annul his arrangement with Vollard, if he continued to "play tricks," and had in mind the substitution of a certain amateur dealer of the name of Bibesco, who had already made the suggestion that he should replace Vollard and give 250 francs for each canvas.

Gauguin now wrote to ask Daniel to approach Bibesco, for he was determined that, if he accepted and on receipt of his first monthly payment of 300 francs, he would dispense with Vollard's services, for there were enough canvases in Paris in Daniel's hands with which to settle his account. De Monfreid had written to tell him that Vollard was ready to pay 250 francs for each canvas, instead of the 200 francs that had been arranged, but from Vollard himself he had heard nothing; ". . . but that proves once more how anxious he is to have my canvases and how easy it will be at a given moment to make them rise. If only I had some money in hand! I would write to him immediately—with a greater assurance since he does not keep his word over his arrears: 'Monsieur, you have advanced me so much, here it is—our contract terminates.'" The muddle had, however, only begun.

When the next month came, with its seasonal aggravation of Gauguin's bad health, the promised 400 francs arrived from Vollard who, however, declared that he had sent a few days before a separate sum of 300 francs which, according to his reckoning, would have brought the payments up to date. Gauguin put the outstanding amount at 1,000 francs and doubted the despatch of the 300 francs for he had not received the separate advice confirming the despatch of the money which was always sent by the bank, and it seemed impossible that the advice as well as the money had gone astray. He bemoaned the disorder in his affairs and the sad impression that it gave to his creditors.

Against this complicated bother he was able to set the news that the canvases which he had sent off at the end of February had, finally, been received by de Monfreid. The settler who

had taken them had inexplicably mistaken the address. Daniel had sold two canvases almost immediately, and Gauguin found himself in possession of an unexpected sum of over 1,000 francs and a new connection with a rich collector, a Monsieur Fayet, who lived at Béziers in the Midi, and who was reputed by an exiled Béziers resident in Tahiti to possess thirty million francs. The prices paid by Fayet compared very favourably with those paid by Vollard, and Gauguin had to regret that friends of Monsieur Fayet bought from Vollard instead of de Monfreid. This new market for his paintings had originated unexpectedly through a canvas that Gauguin had given to a Paris dentist who had later moved to Béziers, where Fayet had seen it in his waiting-room.

Gauguin's first act in receiving the money from Monsieur Fayet was to return to the hospital at Papeete for a month, at the rate of twelve francs a day. He had fever and was placed on a rigorous diet that did little to sweeten his temper. "I am here," he barked to Daniel after the turn of the year, "suffering from the eczema of my feet, from influenza, and finally to spend the three hundred francs which Vollard sends me when he sends them." Monsieur Fayet had shown a liking for the pottery figure, the Oviri, so that Gauguin now decided to sell it instead of having it for his tomb.

Gauguin left the hospital in February and immediately set about finding wood for sculptures. He felt better, if not yet cured, and strong enough to undertake some work that could be sold to Fayet. Vollard sent the balance that he owed, and to Gauguin's gratification gave the impression that he was frightened of losing him. "While I think of it," he asked Daniel, "have you properly instructed Vollard in the treatment of my canvases with wax; for I'm always afraid that he will spoil them with that dirty varnish that picture-dealers are crazy about?" He also asked his friend to buy him a humidity-resisting Spanish mandoline, with cords, and asked him to apply to Maillol for advice if he needed it.

The influenza epidemic lasted in the island for several

months. Gauguin, after having been a victim in September and January, was ill again in April. The islanders were very susceptible to this Western infection and many hundreds died. The bubonic plague in San Francisco finally obliged the island's authorities to put all incoming ships in quarantine, with the result that prices rose until the cost of living was higher than in Paris.

Gauguin was faced with a sudden decision. It had become difficult, even with three hundred francs a month, to live in comfort, without worry, and he made up his mind, in spite of the great love that he had for his hut and garden and plantation, that the time had come to sell and to move at last to the Marquesas, where life was reported by everyone who knew the Archipelago to be infinitely simpler and cheaper than in Tahiti. Vollard's monthly pension would be more than enough; and he was certain that he would find new elements for his painting. He would be fulfilling the desire that he had had since his first visit to Tahiti ten years before.

Whatever complaints Gauguin may have had over Vollard's irregularity with the payment of his monthly pension, he had received money from him for eleven months and he had not sent to France any canvases since the parcel that had for some months gone astray and that had been sent to de Monfreid before the arrangement with Vollard had been finally concluded. He was more than ever convinced that the dealer was trying to make a corner in his work, and the idea alternately annoyed him and made him feel that nothing really mattered as long as he had money for food. He had worked a little since his last visit to the hospital, preparing the canvas as well as he could with an absorbent surface. He told Daniel, however, to deliver to Vollard, should he show signs of impatience, older canvases that he held of his, but not from the special reserve of pictures that were being held for the future against the inevitable rise in prices—pictures from which he too was determined to profit if it were possible and which were only shown to really serious buyers.

By June Gauguin had made all arrangements for leaving Tahiti in the following month. He had found a buyer for his property at Punavia for 5,000 francs (£200). After paying off a mortgage of 800 francs he calculated that he would still have sufficient capital for building himself a hut in the Marquesas. When the deed was about to be signed, it was discovered however that the law of the "Community of Property," under which he had been married, did not allow him to dispose of his property without Mette's signature—an unforeseen and vexing complication that might greatly reduce the money that he would have for his later installation if Mette claimed her legal share. He was obliged temporarily to increase his mortgage and to control his fury.

Daniel was again, inevitably, called in to help. Gauguin sent him a draft-letter which he proposed Daniel should send to Mette—it was so long since he had heard from her that he advised his friend to ask Schuffenecker for her address—that was designed to persuade her to give her authorisation without delay and without claiming a share that, if legally hers, was in Gauguin's eyes not so morally. It contained a series of pretty but undoubtedly imperative falsehoods. "Madame," it ran, "your husband who, since his arrival from Paris has contracted a form of eczema of his shattered foot, is, in the opinion of his doctors, forced to return to France if he wishes to be cured. After having bought a small plot of land and himself built his small hut, he finds himself the possessor of an insignificant sum that is, however, sufficient to pay a part of his voyage. Unfortunately, the French law demands your authorisation and legalised signature for the sale of this small property as it forms part of the 'Property of the Community.' Now, all of the 'Property of the Community' is in your hands except this, and I do not doubt for a single instant that you will raise any objection. Kindly, therefore, immediately (in order that I may reply to your husband by this mail) send me this power of attorney signed, of which I enclose a draft . . ." Gauguin, not forgetting possible and similar bothers, added: "Make the

power a general one so that it can serve in the future for my new property in the Marquesas if I wished to sell."

Gauguin did not seem to fear that his departure for the Marquesas would be held up by the lack of Mette's signature, for he told Daniel to send the document in due course to Tahiti and a confirmation to him to La Dominique, the island in the Marquesas Archipelago where he had decided to make his home. Possibly he would have received a sufficient advance from the buyer of his property to enable him to make the journey. He had planned to leave in the following month, July, but he delayed his departure on the receipt of a letter from Daniel announcing the arrival by the following mail of another letter with a sum of money. Vollard had missed another month. He heard also from Charles Morice that a group of friends were attempting to arrange the purchase of his "big canvas," the allegorical "D'où venons-nous?", for presentation to the Luxembourg Gallery in Paris. This was not destined to succeed. Monsieur Roujon was still in charge of the Beaux-Arts. For the moment Gauguin's anxiety was that Vollard should not lay claim to it, for it had not been sold to him in spite of the enquiry which he had made.

The delay of a month was of great advantage to Gauguin, for in his spare time in Papeete he made enquiries about the law that gave his wife an equal claim on his property and he discovered immediately that besides being contestable it could be avoided completely by giving a month's notice in writing of the intended sale and posting it publicly in the Mortgage office. If, at the end of the month, the wife had put in no claim, her rights were forfeited. Although it was entirely to his advantage, he was indignant that such a law could exist. He found it contrary to all sense and invented to favour the swindling of honest people, for it was obvious that long before a wife in Europe could know of what was happening she would have forfeited her rights.

He put up the notice of his intended sale and was at last in possession of his money—he obtained 4,500 francs for the

property instead of the original five thousand—and was free to leave. With money in his pocket, he began to feel more independent and reflected on his arrangement with Vollard again. The Bibesco affair had fallen through but he was determined that, as soon as he had enough money to assure himself a year or two's freedom, he would still give Vollard notice. He was feeling milder, however, and the break was to be done "Not brusquely, but becomingly." If Vollard then wished to continue as his dealer, he would have to pay at least five hundred francs a canvas.

Daniel received last instructions for forwarding money, parcels, and letters to the Marquesas. Money was to be sent as a draft on a German commercial house that had branches throughout Oceania, letters and parcels were to be addressed in his name *"à la Dominique, Groupe des Marquises,"* but were never to be registered for he had been told that he would be obliged to go to fetch them himself, an expedition which would entail a long ride on horseback and which, in his condition, was unthinkable. He assured Daniel that he was not undertaking a hazardous adventure. He was merely certain that from every point of view he would be better off in the Marquesas, that his money would go further and that his painting would receive a new and essential impetus. His health was bad, but he was almost used to his sufferings at last. If he needed European necessities he would find them in La Dominique as easily as in Tahiti. He would escape, he imagined, the encroaching *imbéciles* who were transforming Tahiti into a garish copy of a Paris *faubourg*, as well as the vigorous missionaries who had transformed the islanders in little over half a century from one of the most beautiful and healthy races of the earth into a dying people who were cowed and restricted by imported theories, religious forms, and the consciousness of sin. The missionaries could not perhaps be held responsible for the importation of the diseases of the West, but by forcing the islanders to wear unsuitable and totally unnecessary extra clothing they had lowered their vitality and resistance and made them

better subjects for the diseases and epidemics when they came.

The mail came and Gauguin left, as he had planned. Nothing is known of his feelings nor of his regrets if, in fact, he had any on his leaving. His *vahiné* and his son returned most probably to their village, for there was no difficulty or embarrassment for either of them. They may or may not have seen him off as Tehura had done.

Gauguin's mind was full of plans and new intentions and, with such prospects as he had, he cannot have taken leave of Tahiti with great difficulty, for of the great period of the Pomarés that he had, ten years before, come to discover there was now not the slightest trace.

PART V

"À ma fenêtre ici, aux Marquises, à Atuana, tout s'obscurcit, les danses sont finies, les douces mélodies se sont éteintes."

PAUL GAUGUIN: *Avant et Après*

Chapter Twenty-One

THE LAST ESCAPE: HIVA-OA

At last, in September 1901, Gauguin arrived in the Marquesas.

They were not coral atolls, like the Paumotos that lay between them and the Societies, but the steep peaks of a submerged mountain range resembling Tahiti in formation but not in spirit. At their creation they had been hurled up from a great depth of the ocean and now lay almost gloomily and menacingly in the bright sea with their sharp dark cliffs, shattered into precipices, falling into deep water on every side. Unlike the Societies they were not surrounded by coral, for almost everywhere the depth of the water prevented the formation of the reefs. Only around some of the lower islands or in the smaller bays between the giant cliffs was there a sign of surf, where the sea was broken by young reefs growing on the shallow sea-beds. The appearance of the islands was more savage than that of the Societies, wilder and more luxuriant, but brooding in the sea. The islanders had been cannibals in the past and the feeling that hung over the islands was violent, almost as if it had impelled the Marquesans to adopt those practices which the Tahitians had never known. To approaching schooners the islands of Hiva-Oa and Tahuata stood up, often capped in cloud. Deep valleys scarred the mountain ranges and cut into the green forests, making dark steep shadows. From the sea half-bare cliffs rose up gauntly, and the incessant and melancholy cry of the sea-birds that lived on them came over the water. Far inland in the mountains were the giant stone images of buried kings on altar platforms, overgrown now with the high silence of the hills and the destructive vegetation, and abandoned by the greater sadness of the voicelessness of a dying population. The soil of the islands was very fertile and could have supported many people, but various causes had arranged

that the coming of the civilisation of the West should have allowed the islanders to die away in numbers and vitality.

The islands of the Archipelago had been almost forgotten after the Spaniards from Peru had discovered the southern group in the sixteenth century, and during the following centuries only occasional traders and castaways had kept up a meagre contact with a world that still had no importance for the islanders. Later, the northern group became known, whalers began to use the anchorages of the Archipelago, while foreign warships passed among the islands sometimes. But when the French came to take possession in the middle of the nineteenth century, the isolation that the islands had enjoyed for so long gave to the diseases of the West too many over-easy victims. Consumption, small-pox, and measles killed the people, inbreeding enfeebled them, so that at the end of the nineteenth century there were little more than four thousand inhabitants in the whole of the Archipelago in the place of the sixty thousand that had been there fifty years before. Those who remained lived in the valleys of the larger islands, having left the smaller islands uninhabited, fleeing like refugees from the haunted and emptied villages that had been their homes for many generations and where they had been undisturbed except for their own sporadic and violent cannibalistic adventures. The *taro* and the bread-fruit had been swallowed by the forests when the survivors of the Western epidemics had abandoned their villages, dressed most often in the civilised garments of the West which the Catholic Mission made them wear, to find a little compensating gaiety on the larger islands where cheap sparkling wine and sweet European liqueurs were forbidden to them but yet sometimes to be obtained in place of the fermented drinks which they preferred, but which also had been prohibited, made from the milk of coco-nuts or the juice of oranges, or the flowers of the banana.

Passing through the Bordelaise Channel, that separated the island of La Dominique or Hiva-Oa—the "great cliff"—from the smaller island of Tahuata, schooners dropped anchor in the

sheltered bay of Taha-Uku. The islands of Motane formed a low line to the south. The anchorage was the finest in Hiva-Oa. In places the mountains came down vertically to meet the sea. Jagged and riven, they were whitened with cloud at a great altitude and the sea-air was scented with flower-dust. From the land various noises floated over the water, the eternal calling of the sea-birds, the barking of dogs and the bleating of goats in the mountains, a voice singing faintly.

Gauguin landed on the beach at the end of the long valley of Atuana. It was the most populated district of the island, containing perhaps five hundred people. The valley went deep into the island and in places the mountains came down perpendicularly to it, narrowing it with walls of rock.

The island gave Gauguin a feeling of exultation that he had not known since his first arrival in Oceania. The paintings which he had done in Martinique had made his Brittany canvases look pale, and they in turn had been far outshone by his Tahitian work. Now he relied on the new violence of feeling and colour in the Marquesas to bring his art to its brilliant conclusion. It mattered little at that moment that he was mortally ill and that he suffered incessant pain. It was only his determination to achieve what he had planned that had permitted him to come.

The men who had paddled him to the shore helped him to climb out of the pirogue. He left his trunks and boxes with the building wood which he had brought with him piled on the sand.

Hiva-Oa was the largest island of the Marquesan Archipelago and the first at which schooners called, coming in from the Societies and the Paumotos. The sixteenth-century Spanish discoverer, Mendaña, sent by the Marqués de Cañete, the Viceroy of Peru, had named the island La Dominica, having sighted it on a Sunday, and this name had been preserved by the French as La Dominique. They had, however, established their Administrator, an official who was subsidiary to the Governor of the Societies at Papeete, on the island of

Nuka-Hiva, the second largest and the most populated of the Archipelago, that lay about eighty miles away to the north-west. On Nuka-Hiva also the police had their headquarters and Herman Melville had found Typee.

While, in the Societies, the Protestant Church had the larger following, throughout the Marquesas the Catholic Mission had the greater influence and owned large tracts of country. In the valley of Atuana the land was almost entirely in its hands and Gauguin found that there was none to be sold or even let apart from that owned by the Mission, to whom he would have to appeal and, he was warned, probably unsuccessfully. The Bishop was away when he arrived, so that he was obliged to wait a month until that dignitary returned and before he could be certain that he would be able to find a place in the valley where he could settle down. His trunks and the load of building wood had to remain on the beach where they had been unloaded.

While he waited Gauguin thought that nothing would be lost by appearing to be a supporter of the Mission. He attended Mass each Sunday with all the inhabitants of the valley, the older generation of whom were tattooed, their faces ornamented with blue stripes. Frequently also the whole body was covered. The men, under the decorous clothes which they now wore, often bore raised encrusted designs on their flesh that signified past prowess and exploits. The smell in the hot little church was at times almost suffocating, owing to the great use the islanders made of the cheap scents that the traders imported, patchouli and musk.

During this time, while on a visit to the neighbouring island of Fatu-Hiva, Gauguin had an encounter with a strange old nude hag, the memory of whom filled his mind for a long time, influencing his painting against his will owing to the turbulent effect that it had upon him. Gauguin was sitting outside the hut that he was occupying, smoking a cigarette, thinking of nothing and watching the scarlet light of the setting sun on the mountains. The bush in front of him parted suddenly and a naked and withered body appeared, covered completely with tattooing.

It had the aspect of a giant toad. It walked in a sitting position, so that its posterior touched the ground. It tapped the path in front of it with a stick. The creature made its way slowly towards the painter. Gauguin experienced for the first time a sensation that he could only imagine was fear and he was unable to move. After several minutes the old bent woman reached him and without speaking began to touch him, examining his face and every part of his half-naked body, with a dusty icy hand. He was filled with an extreme nausea. The creature then uttered the one word *"poupa"*—European—and continued on its way, disappearing into the bush behind him.

When he made enquiries he was informed that the old blind woman had for years lived in this condition in the bush and that she fed on the food which was put out by the villagers to feed the semi-wild pigs. She steadfastly refused to wear any clothing beyond a necklace of flowers which she was expert at making for herself. Any clothing that was given to her she tore into shreds.

When the Bishop returned to Atuana, Gauguin's reputation as a good Catholic and as an opponent of the Protestant Pastor of the valley was assured. He, through a gesture of special favour, was allowed to buy half a *hectare* of land, about one and a quarter acres. It was stony and sprinkled with low bushes but it carried a great many trees. As he was buying from a monopoly, however, he was forced to pay between twenty-five and thirty pounds, a sum that seemed out of all proportion to the real value of the land.

The high price extracted from him did little to make his first contact with the Bishop a pleasant matter. It was the beginning of his misunderstandings with the Mission, but a disagreement with that institution could, in any case, not have been long in appearing. His anti-clericalism was almost immediately aroused when he saw how great was the influence of the Catholic Church in the Marquesas and, to his point of view, how detrimental this influence had proved. The Mission and the Civil Authorities kept the islanders in an almost totally

ignorant condition in order to obtain their complete obedience, believing that even a little knowledge would be a dangerous thing for them to possess, and the efforts that Gauguin later made to enlighten them were not appreciated.

The land which he had bought was in the middle of the village and about three hundred yards from the beach, but the coco-nut palms and the banana clumps, the bread-fruit and other trees of all kinds, grew so thickly that it was impossible from it to see any of the other huts of the village. By November, with the assistance of a few men whom the Bishop had specially chosen to help him, he had managed to complete his hut. He was able to do much of the work himself, for since his arrival his health had improved and he was no longer always in pain.

Stout piles were driven into the earth and at a height of about six feet from the ground a rectangular platform was built, which was made solid with cross planks and on which was erected one large room. The walls were formed of dried and interlacing strips of pandanus leaf and the pointed roof was thatched with dried coco-nut leaves. The hut followed the design of the typical Marquesan dwelling, except that it stood on twice as many piles as was customary. It was a precaution that was to serve Gauguin well.

Inside the door to his hut, Gauguin partitioned off an alcove for his bed—two palm logs, one for the head and one for the ankles, with woven grass mats in between. Here he built shelves for his books. The rest of his room was his studio but had at the same time an indoor kitchen. The walls were decorated with spears and daggers from the rue Vercingétorix and were provided with more shelves where his smaller possessions were within easy reach. His furniture consisted of several easels and chairs that he had made himself, a table that performed the functions of a dining-room, and an old harmonium. The entire length of the end wall was occupied by a carpentry bench and above it was a small glazed window. Sufficient light for painting came into the room through the open door. For his afternoon rest in the garden he made a

hammock which he slung between two palms. Between the bright and varying green of the trees and bushes he could see the distant blue of the mountains.

When the hut was ready he had managed to provide himself with everything he considered that he needed, but he had little money over from the sum which he had brought with him from Tahiti. He found that he would be able to live on 250 francs (£10) a month, so that as long as Vollard sent him his money regularly he would be finished with money worries. He found all the provisions that he needed at the well-stocked store of an American trader who was his nearest neighbour and whom he liked. In the village a forty-pound pig was to be bought for five shillings and a chicken for sixpence. His most expensive necessity was wine, for only good wine was still drinkable when the immensely long journey from Europe to the Marquesas had been accomplished. The price of good wine in the islands was more than he could afford, but he had the idea of sending canvases to a wine-merchant in France who in return would send him barrels as he needed them. The cats of the village quickly learned that he would feed them if they came to him. In his garden he kept as pets a cock and a hen. The cock had purple wings, a black tail and a yellow ruff. They had been bought originally for the pot, but the amusement that he found in watching the antics of their frequent mating saved their lives.

Gauguin went outside his property very little. When the building of the hut was complete and he was able to live in it, the pressing work of decorating it followed.

While engaged in this work he was unable to resist the temptation of mocking at the false and hypocritical respectability that he found even here among the Europeans who were engaged in administering the islands for the French Republic. Bourgeois and insensitive to the beauty of the islanders, they looked upon their time in Polynesia only as a period of exile. The European wives of these officials, ugly, suburban, self-consciously respectable and critical, were only capable of

viewing the islanders as "negroes" or "papuans" and of ridiculing the little that they saw of the art and sculpture of the islands as the work of "savages." To these people Gauguin particularly addressed himself but he did not forget to scandalise the Mission also.

As soon as he had succeeded in obtaining his land he gave up the pretence, which he had made at the beginning, of being one of the Mission's supporters. He saw in it the originator of many of the unjust and petty laws that enmeshed the lives of the islanders and he knew that if the Marquesans were a dying race it was due as much to the Mission's civilising efforts, which had taken away the islanders' interest in life, as to the diseases which had ruined their stamina and racial vitality when the first Europeans had come to the Archipelago. The Mission, on the ground that it was idolatrous, had discouraged the practice of sculpture in the islands, and the great sense of decoration which had been natural to the islanders had been almost lost for the reason that it in turn had been held to encourage fetishism. The great sculptures of the past centuries, the bone and mother-of-pearl ornaments and the hardwood statuettes, had been stolen by the *gendarmes* in the valleys and sold to travellers as curios. None had been preserved in Polynesia, so that there was nowhere a record of what the islands had once produced. The islanders might no longer decorate their mats and fabrics with the wealth of geometric design that they had used in the past, nor were they any longer capable of doing so had they wished. They were kept in perpetual fear of breaking the laws of which they were the constant victims. Their language was debased by the introduction of many mispronounced words of French origin. There was only the one distraction of making love left to them, and it was this that the Mission found the greatest difficulty in overcoming.

As was inevitable in Polynesia, when Gauguin's hut was completed, a girl came and installed herself in it with him, until he should choose to turn her out, to act as wife and

cook and companion. She came without any specific invitation from Gauguin himself. But the Mission chose to be scandalised and a protest was made to him about the seemliness of this arrangement. Gauguin had no intention of leading a life of great abandon nor, either, that of a recluse. He had less intention of allowing the Mission to interfere with impunity in his private affairs, and he devised a subtle form of reply, during the decoration of his hut, that he knew the islanders would understand.

While he was engaged on this, his reputation as a libertine was not assisted by the evidence of a certain old woman, whose name was Môo, who also came on occasions, uninvited, to visit him. She was thin and had had eleven children. Gauguin, because he preferred plump women and required that they should be younger than this old doxy, was forced to plead a headache or an approaching attack of measles whenever she came, in order to escape her attentions. When finally, in despair, she ceased going to his hut, and the gossips enquired of her the reason, she avowed sadly that life with him was too exacting, so frequently did he make demands on her favours: ten times, at least, a night.

For the decoration of his hut he had carved and coloured two panels, placing them on either side of the door. They showed nude female figures and held, for the encouragement of his visitors, inscriptions which he had once before carved on panels that he had done in Brittany. "Be mysterious—you shall be happy" was inscribed on one; "Be amorous—you shall be happy" was the recommendation of the other. The spaces between the panels and the ends of the front of the hut were occupied by two large canvases of figures in Polynesian landscapes. He now carved two statues in *bois de rose*, placing them in front of the panels. One represented a horned priest with satanic features, the other a young girl whom he named "Thérèse." She was without clothes, but she had a certain number of flowers in her hair and was partially covered elsewhere with garlands.

One of the favourite wards of the Bishop, a very young girl, had married the beadle of the Mission Church when her time to find a husband had come and she was employed by the Bishop as a servant in his house. Gossip had suggested an undue intimacy between the girl and her employer and everyone in Atuana had heard the story, the Mission with a certain natural touchiness. The story was believed in, except by the more devout members of the Bishop's flock who preferred to think scandalously that he did not have the young girl for his mistress but that he was able to assuage his desires in confessing her. Since the girl's name was Thérèse no one, including the smallest children, could fail to see in the statue of the horned priest a sly caricature of the Bishop and a reminder of the celebrated fact that some of his flock thought that he was possibly no better than they. When this dignitary gave a party to his flock on the "Feast of the Magi," and Thérèse had the peculiar luck to find in her portion of the celebration cake, which the Chinese baker in the village had made, the haricot bean that elected her the "Queen" of the feast—the Bishop, as host, being the "King"—the islanders laughed, for it appeared to them a confirmation of what was so generally suspected.

Gauguin was not yet, however, satisfied that he had sufficiently manifested his defiance. He decorated the alcove inside his hut with a series of lickerish and indelicate photographs which he had bought at Port Said. The islanders when they saw them laughed and forgot them, but the Europeans of the valley never ceased to speak of them and to discuss them pruriently. The Bishop, no longer *persona grata* in Gauguin's hut, was forced to make enquiries among his flock as to the details of the acts that were said to be represented.

To complete his scheme he called his hut "The House of Carnal Pleasure" and he placed a carved plaque with these words[1] above his door.

Among the trees of his garden in front of his hut he built a small kiosk to house a foot-high statuette of the Polynesian

[1] "La Maison du Jouir."

god Atua that he had made from clay and baked in the sun. On the base of it he inscribed some verses written by his friend Charles Morice. They were a lament for the dead gods of Oceania and told of a Polynesian Eve who could only sigh as she contemplated her sterile bosom. But because he had set the statuette aside in a hut of its own, the Europeans of Atuana began to gossip that he prostrated himself before it. It was an Atua of his own imagining, with a stout squat body reminiscent of the Buddhas that possible Javanese immigrants to the islands in the early ages might have brought with them. It was clothed in a cape, below which its fat body bulged, while its head was high and domed. The back was stiff and straight and the shoulders drooped so that the arms lay along the body with the misformed hands on the knees. On the face there lay a strange half-smiling grin.

The Mission could not ignore this phantasy of Gauguin's mind and chose to see in it, besides a sneer at themselves, a rival shrine to the Mission Church itself. But it was not part of Gauguin's scheme to repel the Mission, being merely an imagined symbol of the islands. The more, however, that the Mission showed that they disapproved the greater was Gauguin's pleasure. The feud that had begun with the purchase of his land was to last even after his death.

In spite of these troubles Gauguin's decision to come to the Marquesas seemed to him to have been fully justified. The improvement in his health that enabled him to assist in the building of his hut, allowed him also to paint with a renewed vigour that compensated for the months of total inactivity which he had passed before leaving Tahiti. He was able, in spite of the teachings of the Mission, to find models with more ease than in Tahiti and he soon began to run short of canvas. From Vollard he had been expecting, for more than a year, a stock of canvas and colours but the materials had not yet arrived. Towards the end of the year the position became critical, for it was announced that, after its December visit, the schooner which came once a month from Tahiti with the mails was to

be overhauled and there would be two or three months when it would not come to the islands. It only remained for Vollard, however, to continue to fail him. The November mail brought a letter from the dealer ignoring Gauguin's reminders and requests for materials, but announcing the sale of the "big picture" for fifteen hundred francs and asking what Gauguin wished done with the money. It seemed incredible to Gauguin that the question needed asking. To add bitter to the gall the dealer mentioned that he much regretted finding that he had left until too late the despatch of the monthly allowance. The two years of freedom from financial worry, on which Gauguin had begun to think that he might count, were never to be realised.

At this moment Gauguin had no debts, for he had been able to pay everything that he owed with the funds that his Tahitian property had brought. The terrible experiences through which he had passed made him now all the more anxious to guard against the possibility of finding himself again in those financial straits that, during his last years in Tahiti, had helped his failing health to deteriorate so rapidly and that had made work impossible for him. When in the past he had had materials, he had had no health or no money, or when, as now, he had better health, it was the materials that were lacking. But whatever he felt, he showed no bitterness or cynicism over the continuation of the seemingly automatic perverseness of those combinations of circumstances which prevented him from working without interruption. During the following three months, when the schooner was being overhauled, he was again forced to contract debts, taking a mortgage on his property. He could reflect that he would not have known such worries if he had remained an amateur painter, with a routine life, setting up his canvases on Sundays and holidays as he had once done, but he would have achieved nothing of measurable importance. He could not have waited to venture away only when he had assured himself of a future of orthodox and absolute security. Like others who must create and who must make a complete change in their

lives to be able to do so, he could not have stopped to consider in their entirety such problems. He had had a little property when he made the all important step and that had had to be sufficient.

With the uncertainties of the mails and the forgetfulness of most of his former friends, news often came to him in a roundabout manner. He was very conscious of the abandonment of him by his younger circle of friends, but it was a subject on which he preferred not to think or write. He heard at last that *Noa-Noa* had been published in book form. It had appeared out of season, and, apart from not telling Gauguin what he had arranged, Morice did not apparently trouble to send him a copy.

Gauguin could not escape now from the legend that had grown up around his name, a legend that saw him living in a distant paradise where life required no news, no money for carrying it on; a living legend, however, who sent paintings to Paris that proved to be a profit to anyone but to himself. The time had not yet come for the price of his pictures to rise, for he was still alive. When he had supplied Paris with a large stock of his work at the lowest price, and when he was dead, he could expect matters to be different.

The New Year had come and passed. Gauguin, for the first time for many years, had found a spiritual tranquillity that was almost complete. The Mission had been repulsed for the time and the false respectability of the other Europeans of the valley prevented them from coming to his hut. He now frequently lived alone, never regretting Tahiti where his life had been complicated by the atmosphere of social officialdom that controlled the island. There also there had been the disturbing knowledge of the presence of a town. On Hiva-Oa there was only the day of the irregular arrival of the monthly mail-boat as a distraction.

But the improvement in his health that had come about when he had first come to Atuana did not last for more than a

few months. His energy deserted him again in the face of the worsening of the chronic eczema from which he suffered, and the solitude that he had so much enjoyed on his arrival at Atuana was now sometimes almost unbearable, for there was no one among the Europeans in the valley to give him comfort or encouragement. The ease of the years when he had lived with Tehura and her successors was over and could not be renewed, for he was a profoundly changed being owing to the gradual worsening of his disease.

The arrival of the mail-boat in May brought him letters. After a silence of five months, news came from Daniel de Monfreid. From Vollard there was nothing. In the previous month he had sent the dealer twenty canvases, the product of his first months on Hiva-Oa. He hoped that this parcel would pay off his debt to the picture dealer for his theoretically regular monthly allowance and also leave him a sum to his credit. The last parcel that he had sent had been despatched from Tahiti in the previous August and had, it seemed, been lost in transit. Vollard declared in any case that he had not received it and Gauguin had to content himself by saying that it would be "annoying" if it had gone astray. He learned, too, of a proposed and important exhibition at Béziers from de Monfreid who, however, only gave the information scantily, not saying if Gauguin had been invited to exhibit nor, if he had, what pictures he would send for him. The pieces of half-news that he received were as often as not worse than no news, for like all exiles he could appreciate the comfort of an informative letter, particularly when six months must pass between the sending of a query and the receiving of a reply.

In the middle of the year there was again a long interruption in the uncertain communication with Europe. The whole of one month's mail was lost at sea, having been accidentally dropped overboard from the schooner, and this circumstance so disorganised matters at Tahiti that for three months no mails were sent to the Marquesas, and no flour or rice, nor any news whatever. Then an "obliging" schooner brought a few

letters. Vollard wrote asking for sculpture. There was even a letter from the rich Béziers collector M. Fayet who hoped to be able to arrange, for the following year, an important exhibition of Gauguin's work.

Gauguin had no longer any profound regard for his Brittany canvases and considered them "digested." He did not wish any to be included in the proposed exhibition. It was now solely on his work in Tahiti and the Marquesas that he counted. What had preceded it was not what he wished to be considered as representative of him. He was not anxious for the public in their uncomprehending way to have the opportunity of continuing to wish that he had remained faithful to his early Breton manner.

His feud with the Mission continued, but had resolved itself into a chronic mutual mistrust. Gauguin was, without doubt, an embarrassment to them, for the islanders had discovered that they could go to him for advice, and receive it, while the Mission considered that they alone had the right to impart strictly censored information to them. Gauguin did nothing that the Mission could hold against him legally. They were forced to wait and hope that sometime, if he went too far in his championing of the islanders, it would be possible to expel him from the island.

There was one exchange of courtesies, however, that came as a diversion and afforded Gauguin the opportunity of a full display of the familiar anti-clerical polemics of the time. He wrote, while his energy for painting was low, a treatise of about a hundred pages which he entitled "The Modern Spirit and Catholicism." It amused him to see a certain resemblance between the teaching of the Gospels and contemporary scientific thought and thence to contrast what appeared to him to be the true with the dogmatic interpretation of the Gospels by the Catholic Church, an interpretation which seemed to him to be the cause of the scepticism and hatred that the Church sometimes inspired. It was so near the separation of the Catholic Church from the State in France, that no Frenchman who lived through the

controversies which led up to this disestablishment could forget for long the arguments of which he had been a partisan. This treatise Gauguin caused in an intentionally indirect way to come to the Bishop's notice. In reply Gauguin received, also indirectly, a rich and ornamental volume of the history and achievement of the Catholic Church since its foundation. It was finely printed, illustrated with many photographs, well cross-indexed, "the work of twelve venerable men." The intention was undoubtedly to make short work of his arguments, but Gauguin, for whom the Bible had always been a favourite book, read it attentively and returned it, accompanied by a long note containing his critical appreciation. The Bishop did not reply and there was no further discussion. Gauguin had touched on too many theological controversies, and it was evident, unfortunately, that in composing his reply he had enjoyed himself.

After studying the effect of the teaching of the Mission in the island Gauguin was able to draw satisfaction from one point. The civilising efforts of the Church had not been able to make of marriage more than an amusing ceremony. Marriage was enforced, for it was theoretically the custom since all the younger islanders were received automatically into the Church. The natural promiscuity of the Polynesian woman had in no way been lessened by the European clothes which she frequently had to wear, and the custom of the adoption of children, owing to the married or unmarried mother's incapability of knowing for certain who had been the father, still continued. The bastard was an incomprehensible creation of the Western mind. In Polynesia it continued to bear no stigma and to be adopted by someone at birth and by everyone by instinct. As every woman in the islands would have qualified as a prostitute in Europe, there was in fact no prostitution, for customs must be judged by their opposites. There was no certainty, when the *gendarme* mayor had performed the civil ceremony for two or more couples, that they would be paired in the same way when they arrived at the church for the religious ceremony. The Bishop, in the eloquent manner of all missionaries, would

marry the new pairs, inveighing against adultery while unwittingly being a party to it. On leaving the church there was still no certainty that the bridegroom would not take the bridesmaid away, and that the bride would not take the best man with her to her house. There was no comprehension among the islanders of the word virtue, for there was no knowledge of its opposite. Neither was fidelity understood, for love was almost equally unknown. Gauguin found a little comfort in the fact that the Mission could not induce sentiments in the islanders that were fundamentally incomprehensible to them and that consequently they would probably retain a little of their former charm indefinitely in spite of the unromantic effect that civilisation had on them.

The Marquesans were no longer cannibals and had not been for many years—the missionaries had that great advance to their credit—but Gauguin realised that their love of human flesh was merely dormant. "When you arrive in the Marquesas," he wrote, "you say to yourself, on seeing the tattooing that covers both the body and the face, that these people are terrible fellows. And besides, they have been cannibals. But you are entirely wrong. The Marquesan islander is by no means a terrible fellow; on the contrary he is an intelligent man, completely incapable of meditating evil, gentle to the point of stupidity and afraid of those who are over him. But when one says that he has been a cannibal, one thinks that it is done with; that is not so. He still is, but his violence has left him: he likes human flesh as a Russian likes caviare, or as a Cossack candle-grease. Ask an old sleeping man if he likes human flesh and, waking up at once, his eyes shining, he will reply with an infinite tenderness: 'How good it is!' Naturally there are some exceptions, but so exceptional are they that the others are filled with terror by them."

In agreement with this new docility was the inevitable weakening of stamina of the children whom the Church now had the task of educating. "The younger generation, from the cradle,

sing the canticles in an incomprehensible French, recite the catechism, and then . . . nothing. Soon the Marquesan will be incapable of climbing a coco-nut palm, incapable of going into the mountains to look for wild bananas with which to feed himself. The children, kept indoors at school, without exercise, the body (for decency's sake) always covered, are becoming delicate, unable to bear a night in the mountains. They all are beginning to wear shoes, and when their feet have become softened they will no longer be able to run along the rough paths or cross the torrents by the pebbly fords. We are at present at the sad spectacle of the extinction of a race that is already for the greater part consumptive, its loins sterile and its ovaries destroyed by mercury."

A proof that the Administration was blind to the special qualities of the race that was in its charge was the suggestion made after the great eruption of the volcano Mont Pelée in Martinique. The Administration had no interest in preserving the islanders as a race, being concerned only with the thought of checking the decrease in their numbers. "This extraordinary Governor, named Ed. Petit," Gauguin has recorded, "wrote to the Colonial Minister: 'In the Marquesas the race is dying out. Would it not be possible to send us the surplus population from Martinique?'" If the black flood had come it would have overwhelmed the Polynesians, completing their racial extinction more effectively and radically than all the diseases and proselytisings of the West.

By August the relapse in his health and the increase in his physical sufferings made him reverse his former determination and consider returning to Europe. He would have liked to be able to return in time for the exhibition that M. Fayet had proposed for the following year, but everything would depend on how much money he was able to put aside and how much over and above the monthly allowance from Vollard he was lucky enough to receive. He thought of settling down near the de Monfreids in the Midi or of going to Spain to look

for new material: bulls, and Spanish women whom others had painted often enough but whom he considered he could paint in a new way. It was only his sufferings that made him contemplate deserting a world which he had discovered and where he had found freedom from the deceits of the nineteenth century and from the *imbéciles* who were typical of it. But he had not the means to return. Vollard had again ceased sending him money and Gauguin began to wonder if he were not satisfied with the last parcel of pictures that he had sent.

Mette had not written to him again since Aline's death and he knew less and less of his children. He felt bitter about the way in which he had been treated, feeling that the family of a deported convict would not dare to ignore their father as his family had ignored him. He could not help thinking of the verdicts that might be passed on him when he was dead and conceivably famous. It might be said of him that he had been a heartless man who had abandoned his family, whereas in reality it had been Mette who had always refused to come back with their children to him. It seemed to him to be better to try to forget those who had forgotten him, even if they were his flesh and blood.

He had achieved one important thing at last. The assessment that people in the future might have for his painting did not now worry him in the least. He knew that a true work of art becomes and remains obvious to posterity in spite of the incomprehending and prejudiced disparagements of contemporary critics. If his own work had merit—he had no extravagant opinion of it—that merit would in time appear. He was proud that he had not been unduly influenced by the favourable comments of his friends and that he had always been able to smile in a bored way at adverse criticism. He knew that he had shown how to liberate painting from many of its academic shackles and for that at least he knew he would have to be remembered. He believed that his theories on the development of painting were necessary and he could feel that he had done his duty. He did not have to explain his theories to

those who did not see his reasoning. That time was over a last.

Writing now to Daniel de Monfreid he said: "You have fo a long time known what I have wished to establish: that on has *the right* to attempt everything. My gifts have not give any great result (the pecuniary difficulties of living were to great for such a task), but, however, a beginning has been made The public is in no way indebted to me since my art is only *relatively* good, but those painters to-day who are profiting from this liberty owe me something. It is true that many people imagine that this liberty came about of its own accord. In any case I ask nothing from such people, and my conscience is a sufficient recompense to me."

Very quickly Gauguin's idea of returning to Europe had to take a place in the background, for he continued to receive no money from his dealer. A return to the acute financial crises of Tahiti was averted by de Monfreid who happened to send him the money which had been realised on a picture, but this sum, instead of beginning the fund that was to take him back to Europe and to a possible new lease of life and health, had to be spent on his living. The shadow and the fear of events were there before him again. To fight them he must return to Europe, but without money he could not return. The chain of circumstances had first to be broken, and the power to do so was his no longer.

Towards the end of 1902 came a new and unexpected interruption in the communications with the outside world. A violent cyclone, the worst that had ever come from the north, swept many of the islands of the Archipelago. At Atuana, the valley, at the beginning, was sheltered by the mountains from the worst violence of the wind, but on the lower islands, where the diving season was in progress, nearly all the islanders were drowned.

For several days the weather had appeared threatening, the sky piling up until there was no doubt that a storm of great violence was due. Then, as if helped by a vast submarine

disturbance, the sea rose into a great wave that hurled itself against the cliffs and through the anchorages, and up the sloping valleys, destroying the islanders' huts, overwhelming the cultivated land and claiming many victims. A screaming wind tore through the plantations to the mountains, whipping the rain against the forests and across the bridges that it took with it, filling the rivers and the air with wood and waving fronds of green. Over the roads it spread giant boulders from the cliffs and brightly coloured fish from the sea. The thunder was incessant and deafening. It was as if the brooding violence of the islands had been liberated at last.

After two days, the cyclone grew to its climax. Violent squalls hit Gauguin's hut in spite of its comparatively sheltered position, tearing away portions of the coco-nut roofing and bursting through the walls so that it was impossible to keep a lamp alight. Palms fell in his garden and massive branches from his bread-fruit trees cracked and were torn off by the wind.

He began to fear that his hut would be demolished also. The river, which usually was shallow and pebbly, collected in its bed the weightier objects that the force of the wind had dislodged and, with the vast addition of water that had come to it from the sea and from the mountains, it overflowed, pouring where it could find exit and covering the narrow valley, moving with the noise of the slow disintegration of a great stone building. Gauguin, who had been alone when the cyclone had begun, and had remained alone for forty-eight hours, attempted to discover the cause of this unfamiliar and ominous sound. When he succeeded in opening the door of his hut against the wind he could see in the pale watery moonlight that the river had already surrounded his hut, and when he tried to descend his ladder he found himself in swirling water to his waist. It was impossible to escape, and he was forced to drag himself back into his room and lie down and wait. Throughout the long night palms and branches, with wood from the demolished huts of his neighbours, were

dashed against the piles or shot underneath the hut towards the sea.

When the wind fell the next day, in the valley almost all the tall small-rooted tropical trees had been thrown down. Gauguin's garden contained large blocks of stone and tree trunks from the forests in the mountains, while the road that passed in front of his property had been partially swept away. The hut was almost an island, isolated by water which had been dammed by the accumulating debris from the torrent in the night and from the stone constructions that the Administration had built higher in the valley to direct the normal mountain streams. Gauguin's foresight in giving his hut a double support of piles had saved it from destruction, and the damage done to it was easily and cheaply repaired. The village thought that if they were fortunate the Administration would put the valley in order within a year. Many pirogues had been lost and the schooners that had been in the Archipelago had suffered great damage, and there was a long delay before repairs could be effected and communication with Tahiti resumed.

When at last mails and provisions were again able to come to the islands, the new year of 1903 had opened. Gauguin had received news of Paris from Daniel de Monfreid. He was of the opinion that Gauguin would be making a grave mistake to return to Europe. In the minds of those who were familiar with his work he belonged irretrievably to the South Seas and they had become his trade mark. Around his name had grown up a romantic legend that was beginning to attract an added curiosity among collectors, and this was useful to the dealers. He would not be able to keep his arrival in France a secret as he imagined, and this romantic legend might be upset by his reappearance as a tangible and visible being once again. Gauguin was in far worse health than his friends in Paris knew or cared to realise. His sight was now a cause of serious worry to him. He had at last lost all faith in Vollard, and he was concerned about what would become of him if that dealer failed him altogether. The point had come where he could bear

the uncertainty no longer. But he needed several thousand francs before he could return, and it was impossible for him to know how he would be able to obtain that sum before his health made an immediate return imperative.

But in spite of the worry over his health and his finances he was still content with the life that he had made for himself at Atuana. The islanders respected him and loved him for the interest that he took in their interests. He was the only European who had ever come to the islands who had not come to exploit them, nor to teach them, nor restrict them. There was nothing arrogant in the interest that he took in them. It did not spring from a desire to be a power among them. He championed them because he saw how much finer they were as a race than the corrupt officials who had control of them and who represented a proselytising and destructive civilisation, and he still passionately regretted the lost times when they had been free and which he had come too late to know. He fought for them, that their final submergence and extinction might be postponed as long as possible. Only two people now came to his hut. One was Ka-Hui, a young boy who came irregularly to him as a servant, the other was an old islander named Tioka, a near neighbour, who was now his only regular visitor.

Tioka was very thin, and his appearance was made almost frightening by the tattooing that covered his body. He had never been baptised and was still looked upon by the islanders as a witch-doctor, for, in spite of the "superstitions" that the missionaries had taught them, they still held secretly to their former beliefs. He had been imprisoned for cannibalism in the past but had been released before the end of his sentence. An Italian sea-captain had told him that this had been done on Gauguin's intercession. Gauguin did nothing to dispel the old man's illusion, and as a sign of gratitude Tioka had placed on Gauguin's person and on his hut and garden the sacred *tabu*, a state of affairs which gave Gauguin a special position among the islanders and displeased the Mission even

further. Gauguin supplied the old man with tobacco, and it was Tioka's eyes that would light up and his face soften in the way peculiar to his race when Gauguin asked him if human flesh made good eating. His amazing teeth would shine. He was capable, without cutting himself, of biting open a tin of sardines in less time that it took to do so by the ordinary method. The old cannibal had a great liking for this comparatively unexciting delicacy and would drink the oil to the last drop. "Death," wrote Gauguin, "seems to disdain him."

While Gauguin found it impossible to paint during these months, he spent his time writing in his hut or visiting the valley of Atuana, avoiding as much as possible the sight of Europeans and walking painfully along the tracks that led into the mountains or up into the less populated parts of the valley. He was always dressed in the same way. Like many of the islanders he wore a white cotton armless slip, and had a *pareu* round the waist, and went barefoot. But he wore a green beret with a silver tassel, and this and his bandaged legs gave him a strange appearance that surprised and amused the other Europeans when they saw him.

Chapter Twenty-Two

"AVANT ET APRÈS"

During the first months of 1903, after the cyclone, at all times during the day between working on the necessary repairs to his hut and when he was unable to stand to paint, Gauguin wrote down, as they came to him, memories of his childhood, of Paris, of his painter friends, varied thoughts on many subjects, opinions that he had held during his life, strange fables of his own invention, criticisms of places and people, of books that he had read and remarks that he had heard. He worked often also at night, for he was more than ever a victim of the insomnia from which he had suffered intermittently throughout his life. He did not intend these thoughts to pose as a book; he declined to compete with professional writers. He did not believe that writing was a medium of expression at which he was proficient, for appreciation of the literary qualities of his earlier book, *Noa-Noa*, had not come his way. "I would like," he wrote, "to write in the same way as I make my pictures—that is to say, by following my phantasy, according to the moon, and find the title long afterwards." His jottings, which he illustrated with pen drawings, were not intended for any particular public, but for those only who were curious enough about him to be interested in his theories and opinions. For them he included critical writings and articles—his opinions of the opinions that others had held of him—which reviews had in the past rejected, and which he felt explained and justified his actions. He had found that, although certain critics were always anxious to pass criticism on painters freely, they were not pleased when, in turn, the painters exposed the stupidity of their arguments and comments. He wrote also more that he might forget the present than that he should not forget the past. His mood was cheerful, seldom cynical, sometimes

bawdy but never sour. "Different episodes, many reflections, certain whims come into this collection from no one knows where, converge and depart; a child's game, figures in a kaleidoscope." He bespattered his writings with philosophical exclamations, an enlargement of the method that he had employed in the *Cahier pour Aline*, and they formed the essence of his worldly experience. Put in at random they appeared as punctuations in the manuscript. "Be careful not to tread on the toe of an *imbécile*," he advised; "above all, the toe of an educated *imbécile*. The bite of the latter is incurable." "Glory is of little importance if its foundations are badly built and collapse at the least puff. Besides, the great avoid it. . . ." "Do not be mean except with the title of friend, and beware of being lavish with your *sottises*." "To possess a will is to wish to have one." "There are three kinds of love—moral, physical and manual—Morality, Debauchery, Prudence." "One is only fully aware of a stupidity after having experimented on oneself. . . . Unfortunately one is already old when one realises that it is time to reflect." "At the age of twenty, two things are very difficult to do: choose a career, and choose a woman. All careers are good, but one cannot say: 'All women are good.' " Of himself he said: "My theatre is life; I find everything there, the actors and the *décors*, the noble and the trivial, tears and laughter." "Nothing troubles my judgment, not even the judgment of others." He seemed to have known himself at least as well as his acquaintances, for he also said: "When I want, I am very obstinate."

Gauguin had never been considered by his friends to be widely read, but if he had not been interested in his time in the political controversies of the daily papers—in Paris he had, however, preferred to read *Le Journal* at luncheon than to be obliged to talk to the *imbéciles* of his business acquaintance—he had had his favourite authors: Poe, Loti, Lamartine and Dumas. On a railway journey he remembered that he had invariably read *The Three Musketeers*. Of these and other writers it amused him to record his opinions which, if sometimes

superficial, showed at least that he was acquainted with their work. He had, also, his dislikes. "Formerly I hated George Sand; now Georges Ohnet makes her almost bearable to me. In the books of Emile Zola, the washerwomen, like the *concièrges,* speak a French that does not thrill me. When they stop speaking, Zola, without noticing it, continues in the same tone and in the same French." And for no apparent reason he felt obliged to remark that: "The Marquis de Sade does not interest me, I assure you; but, dear me, that is not at all through virtuousness."

Gauguin found on reflection that his opinions of the Danes were unchanged, and he recorded some of them. "Zola," he claimed, "had his hatreds. Without being, like him, a great man, one may, it seems to me, also have one's hatreds. I belong to such people. I hate Denmark profoundly. Its climate, its inhabitants. . . . Let me take you into a *salon* the like of which is rarely seen to-day: the *salon* of a count of the great Danish nobility. The vast *salon* is square. Two enormous panels of German tapestry, made specially for the family, as wonderful as it is possible to imagine. Two overmantels, views of Venice by Turner . . . marquetry tables, period stuffs. You enter and are received. You sit on a pouffe, in the shape of a slug, in red velvet, and on the wonderful table there is a cloth costing a few francs from the *Bon Marché,* a photograph album and flower vases in the same *genre.* Vandals! Next to the *salon* is a charming museum-like room. The picture collection; the portrait of an ancestor by Rembrandt, etc. . . . It smells of must . . . no one goes there. The family prefers the chapel where one reads the Bible and you freeze. . . . Very practical the Danes . . . try them, but do not get tied up with them." Thinking of the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen and his play, *An Enemy of the People,* Gauguin noted: "So little is needed for a woman to fall, whilst a whole universe has to be raised to help her up . . . without contesting the genius of Ibsen, I would like to say this, that we French are perhaps just as steady going; less heavy perhaps. In the mythology of the North the winds appear

to me very harsh and send me off in quest of a ray of sunshine. All those *pasteurs*, professors, young girls, who, however sentimental they may be, never however forget to eat a great deal, smoked fish and hams without forgetting game: all these people appear in a French setting as heavy statues. In the hands of a Rodin I would begin to like them."

He reflected on Paris statues and on the badness of them, and on the inevitability, in the stone hands of a dead writer, of a symbolic book and pen. To carry this idea to its logical conclusion he felt that the inventor of an enema should be represented by a clyster-pipe, and that if, one day, a statue were erected to H. G. Wells an invisible ray would be suitable. He was doubtful, however, of the practicability of a sculptured balloon as a memorial to Santos-Dumont and was bothered over the feasibility of representing Pasteur's microbes. But the matter was settled in his mind by realising that statues were so often erected at a height of one hundred and fifty feet above the ground and that it was impossible to see if they were works of art or turnips.

His eyes wandered round his hut, and things in it called up other memories and criticisms. Of the painter Degas he had several things to record, provoked by the sight of a photograph of one of his paintings. "Who knows Degas ? No one, would be an exaggeration. A few only. I mean, who know him well. Even by name he is unknown to the millions of readers of the daily papers. Painters alone, many through fear, the rest through respect, admire Degas. Do they understand him well? Degas was born . . . I don't know when, but so long ago that he is as old as Methuselah. . . . He respects Ingres, which means that he respects himself. To see him with his silk hat on his head, his blue spectacles on his nose, he looks like the perfect lawyer, a bourgeois of the time of Louis-Philippe, not forgetting the umbrella. If there is a man who does not try to look like an artist it is he; he is so great a one. . . . At my exhibition at Durand-Ruel's, two young and well-intentioned people being unable to explain to each other my painting, as

respectful friends of Degas, wishing for an explanation, asked him his opinion. With his kindly, fatherly smile he, so young, recited to them the fable of 'The Dog and the Wolf.' 'You see, Gauguin is the wolf.'" Elsewhere he added: "The dancers of Degas are not women. They are machines in movement with graceful and prodigious lines of balance, arranged like a hat from the rue de la Paix with the same lovely artificiality. . . . Degas is one of the race of masters who, having only to stoop to pick up palms, honours, fortune, has refused without asperity or jealousy. He walks so simply through the crowd!"

Gauguin was never under the illusion that he was a painter of the first rank, although in one letter to Mette, written ten years before, he had found it politic and flattering to agree with her suggestion that he was a great artist, a suggestion that she had for so long withheld from him, and that he then found as a reason for having endured the privation and suffering which he had been forced to undergo. "I have never known," he wrote, "how to make a drawing properly, how to wield a *tortillon* and a ball of bread. I always feel that something is missing: *colour*. When I have before me the face of a Tahitian girl, the white paper bothers me."

In a short manuscript which he had written in the previous September and entitled *Les Racontars d'un Rapin*, he had set out his general views on his art and particular views on the work of certain of his contemporaries. For contemporary criticism he had no respect; it appeared to him as a well-organised system of censure, destructive and not constructive as in the days when criticism was pure comment, intended to inform the public, before it had become the vehicle for leisurely dogmatism. The Director of the Beaux-Arts, the school inspectors, the critics, seemed to him to be primarily *gens de lettres*, while the directors and keepers of museums were primarily politicians.

Gauguin believed that the knowledge of how to draw did not mean that the artist knew how to draw well. The winners

of the academic prizes, the Prix de Rome and other much desired academic palms, knew how to draw with a beautiful exactness that was their only claim. They went to Rome, and their names were lost ever after. Good drawing was the gift rather of a man such as Renoir, who however appeared to him never to have known how to draw. "With Renoir, nothing is in its place. Do not look for his line. It does not exist. As if by magic, a lovely tongue of colour, a caressing light is sufficient." In support of his belief he could not forget that at the École des Beaux-Arts the parrot cry was that "Delacroix is a great colourist, but he does not know how to draw." To his first master, Camille Pissarro, he admitted his gratitude and his debt. "If one examines the art of Pissarro in its entirety, in spite of its fluctuations, one finds not only a great artistic intention, but, besides, an essentially intuitive art of true distinction. However far one may be from the hayrick on the hillock, Pissarro is able to go out, walk round it, examine it." Elsewhere Corot was "delicious"; Whistler appeared to him as a *master* on whom Paris had had the best of influences. He dismissed Burne-Jones, and in spite of his personal liking for Carrière he found that he was not interested in what passed in his imagination. Cézanne appeared to him to derive from no one and was content to be himself, having once studied Rembrandt and Poussin "with understanding." He appeared to him as if he were playing on a great organ, almost as a pupil of César Franck. He was explicit over his admiration for Ingres, who appeared to him to have set himself the task of reconstructing "a logical and lovely language, after his own manner, with one eye on Greece and the other on Nature. . . . Between Ingres and Cimabue there are common chords. Ridicule —*le Beau ridicule*—among them, a thing which makes one say: There is nothing that resembles a daub so much as a *chef-d'œuvre*. And *vice versa*." But the comparative importance of individual artists no longer interested him. It was sufficient that a man should have added his contributory link to the great chain of painting for him to have achieved something.

Elsewhere in a short manuscript that he had named *Diverses Choses*, and that to a certain extent he had incorporated into this latest collection of jottings, he had discussed his attitude towards an artistic technique. "No, I have none," he declared. "Or rather I have one, but very vagabond, very elastic, following the mood in which I wake in the morning, a technique that I use in my own way to express my thoughts, without taking into consideration the truth of Nature that is externally apparent."

As the writing of *Avant et Après* progressed, more and more of the memories of his childhood came back to him, with memories of his rebuffs in Paris. Roujon, the Director of the Beaux-Arts, could not be forgotten. It had been he who had allowed the State to go back on its promise, who had not given him the commissions or the orders which he felt were his right and which could have saved him from the continuation of the general neglect that had been his misfortune after his return from his "Artistic Mission." He had been amused when Roujon had said that his art "revolted" him, but he could not forget that he had said also that it was "too revolutionary." "What!" Gauguin exclaimed among the torrent of thoughts that he noted, "I, a revolutionary; I who adore and respect Raphael. What is revolutionary art? At what epoch does its revolution cease?" He was, in spite of his boasting, sensitive to the judgment of others. He had always cared profoundly for the goodwill of those whom he knew but the fact that he had had so little had affected him less than it would have another man, perhaps, who had been less patient.

Gradually the intentions of his life found statement among the many pages. "On an intelligence that is mine I have wished to erect a superior intelligence which shall become that of my neighbour if it suits him. The effort is cruel, but not useless. It is pride and not vanity." Consciously or not, he was aware that his life was nearly over, and in two disconnected passages he summarised his attitude to it. "I consider that life has sense only when one practises it voluntarily or as voluntarily

as one wishes. Virtue, good, evil are words . . . they only possess a true meaning if one knows how to apply them. To put oneself back into the hands of one's Creator is to be annulled and to die." The second was provoked by his reflections on the way in which his younger friends, with whom he had surrounded himself in order to have an audience that he could control and whom he had once helped and advised, had forgotten or renounced him. He did not feel that there was room for false modesty. "For I have worked and employed my life well; intelligently even, with courage, without tears, without destroying. I had, however, very good fangs."

Gauguin had lived a life that he had chosen for himself. It had not been a comfortable life, but through the years of suffering he had carried out the mission that he had felt was his. He had been forced to obey the demand that comes sooner or later in the lives of all artists, good or bad, that everything that hinders the practising of their art has to be renounced, so that there can be no alternative occupation to prevent them from doing as they feel impelled. He had been born with great patience with himself, and it had been fortunate for him. He had been born a sensualist, but one whose desires had developed late when his family life had been destroyed. Like many less strong characters he had not been able to suffer fools gladly. If he had not been recognised as one of the greatest artists of his period it was because that was not what he was, and he had been content with the little recognition that his ideas had brought him. He had never wished for more than enough money to be able to paint in tranquillity: he had been exasperated but not embittered by the little success he had had in achieving this modest desire. Whatever his later sufferings may have meant to him, he was at no time, for long, unhappy. If the disease from which he had suffered since his return to Oceania had caused him great suffering, the accompanying sense of superiority, that was still to prove fatal to him, had been an active compensating force. His courage was manifest. He had never failed to say what he thought, nor to do what he

wished, regardless of any consequences; he had had many opportunities of causing pain to others, but he went through life with as great a disregard for them as he could. The writing of *Avant et Après* was his testament even if, in it, he made no mention of the disposal of his worldly property.

When he had finished, he sent his jottings to a friend, André Fontainas, for whom he had a great regard, with the request that it should be printed "at all costs."

Fontainas had reproached him for allowing so little of his work to be seen and Gauguin was forced to conclude that Vollard was not showing everything that he had received. The dealer had not mentioned the last parcel of canvases which had been sent to him eleven months before, but if he had not received them Gauguin knew that he would not have failed to tell him.

Gauguin was unable to do anything but wait, for he was tired.

Chapter Twenty-Three

FURTHER CONTROVERSIES

During the time since his arrival in the island Gauguin had been observing with growing indignation the high-handed and arbitrary methods employed by the local authorities when dealing with the islanders. They were frequently imprisoned for minor delinquencies and even for acts within their rights that were in no way crimes. The point had been reached where young girls bathing in the river were fined for exposing themselves indecently to the *gendarme* who had hidden himself for the very purpose of watching them. When this official had whiled away enough time in this pursuit he would take them in charge for outraging, however unwittingly, public morals, in this and in every case represented by himself.

Since Gauguin took the side of the islanders on every occasion it was only a question of time before he and the police came into violent conflict. The first serious clash occurred over the imprisonment of an islander who, unable to understand French, had innocently insulted the *gendarme* of the valley. This official had called the man by some scurrilous name which the islander had laughingly repeated back to him. When the man appealed to Gauguin to explain what he had said, Gauguin's right even to enlighten him was contested. While the unfortunate man was put in prison, Gauguin was threatened with expulsion from the island.

But more serious trouble was coming. The islanders were always fighting to be permitted again the consumption of intoxicating drinks, of their own if not of the sweet or sparkling drinks which they had learned to enjoy when the French had first come to their islands and which afterwards had been forbidden to them by the Catholic Mission with the help of the police. The Mission had placed its ban on *kava*-drinking, in an endeavour to prevent the orgies that frequently followed

over-indulgence in this drink which the islanders had made throughout the centuries from chewed pepper-roots and coconut milk. The islanders' licentiousness was originally of a spontaneous kind and "sin" was to them no sin. They had had to be taught the meaning of it when the civilisation of the West with its fearful diseases had first come to their islands.

Before the cyclone the periodic visit of a judge had been expected. He arrived by the first schooner to reach the islands after the disaster, in the company of two Colonial Inspectors who had been sent from Tahiti to report on the condition of the Archipelago. Their arrival gave Gauguin the opportunity of preparing long statements on various points that he considered should be brought to their notice.

The Colonial Inspectors came for the purpose of hearing the complaints and criticisms of the white residents, but when reforms were made after their visits it had been found that they were rarely put through in the way that had been suggested. Frequently, therefore, no suggestions were made for the reason that the white residents, in despair, preferred to keep to prevailing conditions.

The principal grievance was that a judge, on grounds of economy, was sent to the islands only once every eighteen months. He was then in a hurry to complete his work, for there were other islands that he had to visit. The *gendarme's* word was, consequently, invariably taken against that of the islanders who, owing to inadequate interpretation, were unable to put their case. Apart from rare crimes of violence, only offences against the ban on liquor-drinking had, as a rule, to be judged, and in the absence of the judge the *gendarmerie* possessed the right to convict. The penalty for breaking this law was a money fine, and frequently fines out of all proportion to the islanders' means were imposed. The *gendarme* of each district had formerly received one-third of all such fines as his commission or perquisite. This had, however, been suppressed, but to show that he was still doing his duty he would prove sometimes more severe than before. It had, besides, become

the custom. The islanders often preferred to admit a crime even when innocent, for they knew from experience that a denial would merely end in a still heavier punishment. A regime of fear prevailed, the fear of the uneducated for men whom they felt in their ignorance to be superior to them. The *gendarme's* word was law because he was feared. Each in his own district performed as well the functions and duties of mayor, attorney, beach-master, bailiff, and tax-collector.

The ban on the sale of alcohol to the islanders was of comparatively recent introduction. The white settlers found themselves the poorer from the loss of a profitable trade while the islanders, as a result, were possessed of only one idea. They alone came under the ban, for the white population, and any negroes who were there, might buy and consume as much intoxicating liquor as they wished. The islanders consequently took to the drinking of scents, such as lavender water, and to brewing *kava* and other drinks in the mountains illicitly.

Gauguin's case was a thorough denunciation of the legal system as it operated. He gave examples of the disproportionate fines that sometimes in a year amounted to more than half as much again as the whole revenues of a valley and demanded an enquiry into many points that he raised. He levelled many accusations at the *gendarme* of Atuana whom he labelled as "coarse, ignorant, licentious and ferocious in the performance of his duties."

At the same time he sent a copy of the document to Paris to Charles Morice with a request that it should be published at once in the French Press with as strong a protest as possible. If he succeeded in calling attention to the state of affairs in the Marquesas he hoped that the abuses would in time be remedied. He was so completely identified with the islanders in spirit that he felt it to be his duty to take up their cause. He, as the only "savage" who was yet aware of the proper working of justice, could not do otherwise.

Gauguin had already been in conflict with the *gendarme* of the neighbouring valley of Anaiapa over an attempt that that

official had made to prevent the Protestant islanders of his valley from singing their *iménés*. It was an attempt of the *gendarme* to show that he and not the Protestant pastor was the one whom the islanders should obey even in affairs relating to their religion. Gauguin's energetic intervention had secured an acquittal when the islanders had been prosecuted.

A short time before the arrival of the Colonial Inspectors this same official had thought wise to concoct a dishonourable plot. He suggested to the local chief that he should invite a dozen or two of the inhabitants of the valley to a secret drinking party in the mountains for the purpose of enjoying illicitly brewed *kava*. While the party was at its height the *gendarme* himself appeared and took the names of all present with a view to a prosecution. He had the capricious honour to omit from the list of the guilty the name of the chief who, when the representative of the law had descended on the party that he had instigated, was among the most intoxicated of the feasters. The tribunal fined him, however, one hundred francs, the same fine that all the others were forced to pay.

Gauguin was filled with bitterness at this monstrous case of provocation and set himself the task of obtaining some irrefutable proof of the corruption of the *gendarmerie* and thereby forcing the Colonial Administrators to take action. He was able to obtain proof that two American whalers were in the habit of calling at Vaitahu in the neighbouring island of Tahuata with contraband goods. Gauguin had previously intervened on behalf of the inhabitants of this island when they had protested against being obliged to send their children to the Mission school at Atuana, on the ground that it was too far for them across the intervening straits to bring food for their children every day. The *gendarme* of the island, whose many occupations naturally included that of customs officer, was a party to the illegal landing of certain merchandise without the payment of the necessary tax, while he himself bought whatever he wished. The women of the island, as well as many who came across the channel that separated Tahuata

from Hiva-Oa in their pirogues were encouraged to go on board the whalers, where, in return for their favours, they were given various articles that they coveted. This system of happy barter took place at night-time when the *gendarme* was no longer on duty and had had himself replaced by a native guard who inevitably took part in the drinking which accompanied the women's nightly visits.

Gauguin added this accusation to the statement that he submitted to the Colonial Inspectors at the beginning of February. But he did not know that there was only one side to the law in those latitudes and that all those who had the administration of the Archipelago in their hands were in league.

Gauguin's accusations were held to be untrue and libellous, and a prosecution against him was instituted. On the orders of the Administration, and to vindicate the *gendarme* whom he had arraigned, the judge, who had so opportunely come to the islands, condemned him on the 31st March to three months' imprisonment and a fine of a thousand francs.

For Gauguin this sentence was as terrible as it was unexpected and it meant his complete ruin. If he were to appeal he would have to return to Papeete by the first schooner. There possibly—but he was not too optimistic—a little long-drawn-out justice might be obtained. If he were still unsuccessful, his last resort would be to appeal to Paris. He needed above all things the services of an honest lawyer.

The costs of an appeal were impossible to calculate, and this disaster had overtaken him at a time when he had not even the money for the passage to Tahiti. Vollard had for three months—it was April—left him again without money or news. Gauguin wondered charitably if he were dead or bankrupt. Vollard, he calculated, owed him fifteen hundred francs as well as an advance on the parcel of canvases which he had sent the year before and to which the dealer had made no reference.

The mortgage that he had been obliged to take on his property now amounted to fourteen hundred francs, and it seemed possible

that the Trading Company would refuse any further advance, even for his passage to Papeete. He was in a terrible trap. This new anxiety was more than his body could survive: added to his illness it was mortal.

Gauguin's courage did not however desert him, and when the April mail-boat left he sent by it three pictures which he had forced himself to paint. At the same time he wrote to de Monfreid to tell him of the disaster that had overtaken him. As he needed immediate help he sent the canvases to M. Fayet. He asked de Monfreid to try to persuade M. Fayet to buy all three pictures, or, if he did not like them, to choose three others from the stock that de Monfreid still held of his work, and to send him fifteen hundred francs as their price. He trusted that M. Fayet, who was rich and had already bought his work, would assist him in this crisis.

It would be six months before he could be certain of a reply, but, like his courage, his patience also had not deserted him. He had always managed to overcome his difficulties in the past. Whenever he had found himself on the point of being beaten by circumstances he had always been enabled to overcome them through some last-minute intervention. He did not doubt that he would be able to overcome them now. He could only wait, but the events that pressed forward now so urgently might not wait, and there was little else for him to do but to brood on the thousand preoccupations that came to him. With his rapidly failing health the worry of them was intolerable and he had to admit the fears that began to come to him. "All these preoccupations," he was forced to admit at last, "are killing me."

Chapter Twenty-Four

THE MISSION IS REVENGED: 8th MAY, 1903

Ka-Hui came and went at his work in the House of Carnal Pleasure. The villagers heard that Koké was ill, but the shock of the result of his intervention on their behalf made them less anxious to go to see him. Only old Tioka did not fail, but Ka-Hui found reasons for deserting his master on occasions. Gauguin had had no connection with the other Europeans of the valley since his trial. With the exception of the American storekeeper and of Monsieur Vernié[1], the young Protestant pastor of the valley, he had for long avoided them all. To Vernié he had recently from time to time gone for medical advice. The Mission people ignored him, waiting like the rest of Atuana for his departure to Papeete. The prison sentence had been suspended until the result of the appeal was known, while the fine which had been imposed on him could not have been collected had the authorities tried to do so.

Towards the end of April Gauguin was forced to send a note to Vernié asking him if he would be good enough to come and see him. He was now unable to walk at all and he was nearly blind. The pastor went to him immediately. Although a neighbour he had never looked upon Gauguin as a friend, but he had always found him full of courtesy and he had noted how he treated the islanders with kindness and simplicity, generously and honourably. Gauguin had been an ill man as long as he had known him, and had appeared to him as a strange figure in his bizarre clothing, half Western, half Polynesian—the dress of a white man who had become an islander.

Vernié found Gauguin in great pain from his chronic eczema and he gave him a dressing which Gauguin insisted, however, on applying himself. When he had done so he began to speak of his work and of the troubles that he had had with the

[1] *or* Vernier

authorities, and of his friends in France. When Vernié left Gauguin gave him a copy of his etching of Stéphane Mallarmé, that he inscribed with the pastor's name, and lent him some books, including the copy of *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* that Mallarmé himself had given to him.

For ten days Vernié heard nothing more. Then Tioka came to him, saying that the white man was very ill. Vernié went again and found Gauguin lying on the mats of his bed groaning. Once more, however, he was able to talk of his painting. Vernié could not help admiring the devotion to his work which made him appear to forget for a time his sufferings.

On the 8th May, early in the morning, Tioka came once more to fetch the pastor. Gauguin complained to him of great pain in every part of his body. He did not know if it were the morning or the evening, the night or the day. Shortly before Vernié's arrival he had had two heart attacks and he was deeply worried about his condition. Then he began to discuss *Salammbô*. But the pastor judged it wiser to leave him after a few moments when he appeared calmer.

About eleven o'clock Ka-Hui came to Vernié to tell him that his master was dead. Vernié hurried back to the House of Carnal Pleasure. Gauguin was lying on his back. One leg was stretched outside the mats of his bed along the floor. He had only been dead for a short time and his body was still warm. But Vernié was astonished to find that the Bishop and several priests were already there, grouped around his bed. Gauguin's feud with the Mission had not prevented it from taking immediate charge of him as soon as he was dead. Old Tioka was also in the hut. He was distracted. He had come to see Gauguin, and hearing no answer when he had called out the painter's name had gone up the wooden steps to the entrance of the hut and had found him dead.

Vernié attempted artificial respiration, while, after the manner of the Archipelago, Tioka bit the hair and scalp of the dead painter in an endeavour to bring him back to life. The old Polynesian, who later received Gauguin's green beret as a

souvenir, felt with the other islanders that everything was lost when Koké died.

Next day the Bishop and the Mission carried out their revenge on the man who had crossed them and who had cold-shouldered them so long. They arranged to bury Gauguin with full ceremony at two o'clock in the afternoon. Vernié, although a rival distributor of the gospel and believing that Gauguin should have been accorded a non-religious funeral, determined to attend the removal of the body. Coming to the House of Carnal Pleasure at the appointed time he found that the Bishop and the Mission had conjured away Gauguin's body half an hour before, taking it to the church and burying it with full Catholic ceremonial in the cemetery in the valley behind the village in ground that was the private property of the Bishop himself. Gauguin, who had known so well how to defend himself against the Mission when he had been alive, was at their mercy and innocuous when he was dead. Of those who saw him buried only the islanders regretted him, but they wisely remembered to keep their feelings to themselves.

Gauguin's possessions were at once seized by the authorities in settlement of his debt to them, the fine that had been imposed and that had remained unpaid. His household things were sold at Atuana: his clothes, his cooking-stove and the few pans and utensils that were in his hut, his carpentry tools, his trunks, his stock of food and wine. His hut and garden became the property of an American trader for a thousand and fifty francs. The rest of his possessions were packed up, after having been censored by the *gendarmerie*, who destroyed what they found to be indecorous, and despatched by schooner to be auctioned at Papeete. His manuscripts and papers were confided to Monsieur Petit, the Administrator, who happened at that moment to be returning to France, for delivery to his heirs.

Gauguin had spoken to no one in Atuana of his family in Europe and a photograph of a woman with five children which

was in his hut was the only indication to the authorities who examined his papers that he might at one time have been married. He had never made known to anyone his last wishes, nor apparently made a will. Nothing was discovered when the papers in his hut were searched. Much gossip had been repeated about him but little information to satisfy the curious was found.

At Papeete, when the auction of his pictures and his more valuable possessions took place, there was a mocking scramble for souvenirs. There were not many canvases, for he had worked little in the preceding months and those which he had thought most saleable he had sent to France in his endeavour to obtain money for his appeal. But among the few that were left was his last, an unsigned and nostalgic memory of a winter scene in Brittany. There were two albums of drawings and the carved wooden decorations from the House of Carnal Pleasure, his palette covered with mounds of brightly coloured paint, and a walking-stick. Another stick, showing two lovers interlocked, the same one which he had carried during his prosperous days in the rue Vercingétorix, had offended the susceptibilities of the *gendarmerie* at Atuana and had been destroyed.

The Governor of the Society Islands was present at the auction and he bought one of the albums by proxy. Among the crowd were officers from merchant ships and some minor officials, the Judge of the island, some passing beachcombers, a drawing master who had turned public-letter writer, a mob of disinterested male and female idlers and several merchants of the town, one of whom bought the walking-stick and the carved statues of Thérèse and the horned priest. The ex-drawing master, after assuring himself of the quality of the paint brushes by testing them on his thumbnail, bought them all at the price of three francs. Gauguin's palette fell to a naval doctor as did several other minor souvenirs. A sub-lieutenant acquired, to the accompaniment of the jocular encouragement of the crowd, a canvas of three women against a yellow sky.

The Breton landscape, held upside down by the auctioneer and announced by him as "The Niagara Falls," was a popular comic success. It became the property of the naval doctor for seven francs, who, for a few francs more, was able to buy the door panels and the overmantel of the House of Carnal Pleasure. The authorities had done as well as could have been expected by the sale.

At Atuana the statue of the god, which Gauguin had fashioned and cooked in the sun's rays and before which he was said to have worshipped, was left in the kiosk in the garden undisturbed and the hut remained empty. The sorrow of the islanders at the death of their only champion left them gradually when they began to think about it less and the *gendarmes* were able to congratulate themselves that a nuisance had been removed. Ka-Hui found another occupation, while Tioka wandered about the valleys of Hiva-Oa proudly wearing his friend's green beret.

But the Mission knew that theirs had been the final victory.


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